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DR. GREATREX'S ENGAGEMENT.



VERYBODY knows by name at least the celebrated Dr. Greatrex, the discoverer of that abstruse molecular theory of the interrelations of forces and energies. He is a comparatively young man still, as times go, for a person of such scientific distinction, for he is now barely forty; but to look at his tall, spare, earnest figure, and his clear-cut, delicate, intellectual face, you would scarcely imagine that he had once been the hero of a singularly strange and romantic story. Yet there have been few lives more romantic than Arthur Greatrex's, and few histories stranger in their way than this of his engagement.

After all, why should not a scientific light have a romance of his own as well as other people?

Fifteen years ago Arthur Greatrex, then a young Cambridge
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fellow, had just come up to begin his medical studies at a London hospital. He was tall in those days, of course, but not nearly so slender or so pale as now ; for he had rowed seven in his college boat, and was a fine, athletic young man of the true English university pattern. Handsome, too, then and always, but with a more human-looking and ordinary handsomeness when he was young than in these latter times of his scientific eminence. Indeed, anyone who met Arthur Greatrex at that time would merely have noticed him as a fine, intelligent young English gentleman, with a marked taste for manly sports, and a decided opinion of his own about most passing matters of public interest.

Already, even in those days, the young medical student was very deeply engaged in recondite speculations on the question of energy. His active mind, always dwelling upon wide points of cosmical significance, had hit upon the germ of that great revolutionary idea which was afterwards to change the whole course of modern physics. But, as often happens with young men of twenty-five, there was another subject which divided his attention with the grand theory of his life : and that subject was the pretty daughter of his friend and instructor, Dr. Abury, the eminent authority on the treatment of the insane. In all London you couldn't have found a sweeter or prettier girl than Hetty Abury. Young Greatrex thought her clever, too ; and, though that is perhaps saying rather too much, she was certainly a good deal above the average of ordinary London girls in intellect and accomplishments.

'They say, Arthur,' she said to him on the day after their formal engagement, 'that the course of true love never did run smooth ; and yet it seems somehow as if ours was wonderfully smoothed over for us by everybody and everything. I am the happiest and proudest girl in all the world to have won the love of such a man as you for my future husband.'

Arthur Greatrex stroked the back of her white little hand with his, and answered gently, 'I hope nothing will ever arise to make the course of our love run any the rougher ; for certainly we do seem to have every happiness laid out most temptingly before us. It almost feels to me as if my paradise had been too easily won, and I ought to have something harder to do before I enter it.'

'Don't say that, Arthur,' Hetty put in hastily. 'It sounds too much like an evil omen.'

'You superstitious little woman !' the young doctor replied with

a smile. 'Talking to a scientific man about signs and portents!' And he kissed her wee hand tenderly, and went home to his bachelor lodging with that strange exhilaration in heart and step which only the ecstasy of first love can ever bring one.

'No,' he thought to himself, as he sat down in his own easy chair, and lighted his cigar; 'I don't believe any cloud can ever arise between me and Hetty. We have everything in our favour—means to live upon, love for one another, a mutual respect, kind relations, and hearts that were meant by nature each for the other. Hetty is certainly the very sweetest little girl that ever lived; and she's as good as she's sweet, and as loving as she's beautiful. What a dreadful thing it is for a man in love to have to read up medicine for his next examination!' And he took a medical book down from the shelf with a sigh, and pretended to be deeply interested in the diagnosis of scarlet fever till his cigar was finished. But, if the truth must be told, the words really swam before him, and all the letters on the page apparently conspired together to make up but a single name a thousand times over—Hetty, Hetty, Hetty, Hetty. At last he laid the volume down as hopeless, and turned dreamily into his bedroom, only to lie awake half the night and think perpetually on that one theme of Hetty.

Next day was Dr. Abury's weekly lecture on diseases of the brain and nervous system; and Arthur Greatrex, convinced that he really must make an effort, went to hear it. The subject was one that always interested him; and partly by dint of mental attention, partly out of sheer desire to master the matter, he managed to hear it through, and even take in the greater part of its import. As he left the room to go down the hospital stairs, he had his mind fairly distracted between the premonitory symptoms of insanity, and Hetty Abury. 'Was there ever such an unfortunate profession as medicine for a man in love?' he asked himself, half angrily. 'Why didn't I go and be a parson or a barrister, or anything else that would have kept me from mixing up such incongruous associations? And yet, when one comes to think of it, too, there's no particular natural connection after all between "Chitty on Contract," and dearest Hetty.'

Musing thus, he turned to walk down the great central staircase of the hospital. As he did so, his attention was attracted for a moment by a singular person who was descending the opposite stair towards the same landing. This person was tall and not ill-looking; but, as he came down the steps, he kept pursing up

his mouth and cheeks into the most extraordinary and hideous grimaces; in fact, he was obviously making insulting faces at Arthur Greatrex. Arthur was so much preoccupied at the moment, however, that he hardly had time to notice the eccentric stranger; and, as he took him for one of the harmless lunatic patients in the mental-diseases ward, he would have passed on without further observing the man but for an odd circumstance which occurred as they both reached the great central landing together. Arthur happened to drop the book he was carrying from under his arm, and instinctively stooped to pick it up. At the same moment the grimacing stranger dropped his own book also, not in imitation, but by an obvious coincidence, and stooped to pick it up with the self-same gesture. Struck by the oddity of the situation, Arthur turned to look at the curious patient. To his utter horror and surprise, he discovered that the man he had been observing was his own reflection.

In one second the real state of the case flashed like lightning across his bewildered brain. There was no opposite staircase, as he knew very well, for he had been down those steps a hundred times before: nothing but a big mirror, which reflected and doubled the one-sided flight from top to bottom. It was only his momentary preoccupation which had made him for a minute fall into the obvious delusion. The man whom he saw descending towards him was really himself, Arthur Greatrex.

Even so, he did not at once grasp the full strangeness of the scene he had just witnessed. It was only as he turned to descend again that he caught another glimpse of himself in the big mirror, and saw that he was still making the most horrible and ghastliest grimaces—grimaces such as he had never seen equalled save by the monkeys at the Zoo, and (horridest thought of all!) by the worst patients in the mental-disease ward. He pulled himself up in speechless horror, and looked once more into the big mirror. Yes, there was positively no mistaking the fact: it was he, Arthur Greatrex, fellow of Catherine's, who was making these hideous and meaningless distortions of his own countenance.

With a terrible effort of will, he pulled his face quite straight again, and assumed his usual grave and quiet demeanour. For a full minute he stood looking at himself in the glass; and then, fearful that someone else would come and surprise him, he hurried down the remaining steps, and rushed out into the streets of London. Which way he turned he did not know or care; all he

knew was that he was repressing by sheer force of muscular strain a deadly impulse to pucker up his mouth and draw down the corners of his lips into one-sided grimaces. As he passed down the streets, he watched his own image faintly reflected in the



panes of the windows, and saw that he was maintaining outward decorum, but only with a conscious and evident struggle. At one doorstep a little child was playing with a kitten; Arthur Greatrex, who was a naturally kindly man, looked down at her and smiled, in spite of his preoccupation: instead of smiling back, the child uttered a scream of terror, and rushed back into the house to hide her face in her mother's apron. He felt instinctively that, in

place of smiling, he had looked at the child with one of his awful faces. It was horrible, unendurable, and he walked on through the streets and across the bridges, pulling himself together all the time, till at last, half-unconsciously, he found himself near Pimlico, where the Aburys were then living.

Looking around him, he saw that he had come nearly to the corner where Hetty's little drawing-room faced the road. The accustomed place seemed to draw him off for a moment from thinking of himself, and he remembered that he had promised Hetty to come in for luncheon. But dare he go in such a state of mind and body as he then found himself in? Well, Hetty would be expecting him; Hetty would be disappointed if he didn't come; he certainly mustn't break his engagement with dear little Hetty. After all, he began to say to himself, what was it but a mere twitching of his face, probably a slight nervous affection? Young doctors are always nervous about themselves, they say; they find all their own symptoms accurately described in all the text-books. His face wasn't twitching now, of that he was certain; the nearer he got to Hetty's, the calmer he grew, and the more he was conscious he could relax his attention without finding his muscles were playing tricks upon him. He would turn in and have luncheon, and soon forget all about it.

Hetty saw him coming, and ran lightly to open the door for him, and as he took his seat beside her at the table, he forgot straightway his whole trouble, and found himself at once in paradise once more. All through lunch they talked about other things—happy plans for the future, and the small prettinesses that lovers find so perennially delightful; and long before Arthur went away the twitching in his face had altogether ceased to trouble him. Once or twice, indeed, in the course of the afternoon he happened to glance casually at the looking-glass above the drawing-room fireplace (those were the pre-Morrisian days when overmantels as yet were not), and he saw to his great comfort that his face was resting in its usual handsome repose and peacefulness. A bright, earnest, strong face it was, with all the promise of greatness already in it; and so Hetty thought as she looked up at it from the low footstool where she sat by his side, and half whispered into his ear the little timid confidences of early betrothal.

Five o'clock tea came all too soon, and then Arthur felt he must really be going and must get home to do a little reading. On his way, he fancied once he saw a street boy start in evident

surprise as he approached him, but it might be fancy ; and when the street boy stuck his tongue into the corner of his cheek and uttered derisive shouts from a safe distance, Arthur concluded he was only doing after the manner of his kind out of pure gratuitous insolence. He went home to his lodgings and sat down to an hour's work ; but after he had read up several pages more of 'Stuckey on Gout,' he laid down the book in disgust, and took out Helmholtz and Joule instead, indulging himself with a little desultory reading in his favourite study of the higher physics.

As he read and read the theory of correlation, the great idea as to the real nature of energy, which had escaped all these learned physicists, and which was then slowly forming itself in his own mind, grew gradually clearer and clearer still before his mental vision. Helmholtz was wrong here, because he had not thoroughly appreciated the disjunctive nature of electric energy ; Joule was wrong there, because he had failed to understand the real antithesis between potential and kinetic. He laid down the books, paced up and down the room thoughtfully, and beheld the whole concrete theory of interrelation embodying itself visibly before his very eyes. At last he grew fired with the stupendous grandeur of his own conception, seized a quire of foolscap, and sat down eagerly at the table to give written form to the splendid phantom that was floating before him in so distinct a fashion. He would make a great name, for Hetty's sake ; and, when he had made it, his dearest reward would be to know that Hetty was proud of him.

Hour after hour he sat and wrote, as if inspired, at his little table. The landlady knocked at the door to tell him dinner was ready, but he would have none of it, he said ; let her bring him up a good cup of strong tea and a few plain biscuits. So he wrote and wrote in feverish haste, drinking cup after cup of tea, and turning off page after page of foolscap, till long past midnight. The whole theory had come up so distinctly before his mind's eye, under the exceptional exaltation of first love, and the powerful stimulus of the day's excitement, that he wrote it off as though he had it by heart ; omitting only the mathematical calculations, which he left blank, not because he had not got them clearly in his head, but because he would not stop his flying pen to copy them all out then and there at full length, for fear of losing the main thread of his argument. When he had finished, about forty sheets of foolscap lay huddled together on the table before him,

written in a hasty hand, and scarcely legible; but they contained the first rough draft and central principle of that immortal work, the 'Transcendental Dynamics.'

Arthur Greatrex rose from the table, where his grand discovery was first formulated, well satisfied with himself and his theory, and fully determined to submit it shortly to the critical judgment of the Royal Society. As he took up his bedroom candle, however, he went over to the mantelpiece to kiss Hetty's photograph, as he always did (for even men of science are human) every evening before retiring. He lifted the portrait reverently to his lips, and was just about to kiss it, when suddenly in the mirror before him he saw the same horrible mocking face which had greeted him so unexpectedly that morning on the hospital staircase. It was a face of inhuman devilry; the face of a mediæval demon, a hideous, grinning, distorted ghoul, a very caricature and insult upon the features of humanity. In his dismay he dropped the frame and the photograph, shivering the glass that covered it into a thousand atoms. Summoning up all his resolution, he looked again. Yes, there was no mistaking it: a face was gibing and jeering at him from the mirror with diabolical ingenuity of distorted hideousness; a disgusting face which even the direct evidence of his senses would scarcely permit him to believe was really the reflection of his own features. It was overpowering, it was awful, it was wholly incredible; and, utterly unmanned by the sight, he sank back into his easy chair and buried his face bitterly between the shelter of his trembling hands.

At that moment Arthur Greatrex felt sure he knew the real meaning of the horror that surrounded him. He was going mad.

For ten minutes or more he sat there motionless, hot tears boiling up from his eyes and falling silently between his fingers. Then at last he rose nervously from his seat, and reached down a volume from the shelf behind him. It was Prang's 'Treatise on the Physiology of the Brain.' He turned it over hurriedly for a few pages, till he came to the passage he was looking for.

'Ah, I thought so,' he said to himself, half aloud: "'Premonitory symptoms: facial distortions; infirmity of the will; inability to distinguish muscular movements.'" Let's see what Prang has to say about it. "A not uncommon concomitant of these early stages"—Great heavens, how calmly the man talks about losing your reason!—"is an unconscious or semi-conscious tendency to

produce a series of extraordinary facial distortions. At times, the sufferer is not aware of the movements thus initiated; at other times they are quite voluntary, and are accompanied by bodily gestures of contempt or derision for passing strangers." Why, that's what must have happened with that boy this morning! "Symptoms of this character usually result from excessive activity of the brain, and are most frequent among mathematicians or scholars who have overworked their intellectual faculties. They may be regarded as the immediate precursors of acute dementia." Acute dementia! Oh, Hetty! Oh, heavens! What have I done to deserve such a blow as this?

He laid his face between his hands once more, and sobbed like a broken-hearted child for a few minutes. Then he turned accidentally towards his tumbled manuscript. 'No, no,' he said to himself, reassuringly; 'I can't be going mad. My brain was never clearer in my life. I couldn't have done a piece of good work like that, bristling with equations and figures and formulæ, if my head was really giving way. I seemed to grasp the subject as I never grasped it in my life before. I never worked so well at Cambridge; this is a discovery, a genuine discovery. It's impossible that a man who was going mad could ever see anything so visibly and distinctly as I see that universal principle. Let's look again at what Prang has to say upon that subject.'

He turned over the volume a few pages further, and glanced lightly at the contents at the head of each chapter, till at last a few words in the title struck his eye, and he hurried on to the paragraph they indicated, with feverish eagerness. As he did so, these were the words which met his bewildered gaze.

'In certain cases, especially among men of unusual intelligence and high attainments, the exaltation of incipient madness takes rather the guise of a scientific or philosophic enthusiasm. Instead of imagining himself the possessor of untold wealth, or the absolute despot of a servile people, the patient deludes himself with the belief that he has made a great discovery or lighted upon a splendid generalisation of the deepest and most universal importance. He sees new truths crowding upon him with the most startling and vivid objectivity. He perceives intimate relations of things which he never before suspected. He destroys at one blow the Newtonian theory of gravitation; he discovers obvious flaws in the nebular hypothesis of Laplace; he gives a scholar's-mate to Kant in the very fundamental points of the "Critique of Pure Reason."

The more serious the attack, the more utterly convinced is the patient of the exceptional clearness of his own intelligence at that particular moment. He writes pamphlets whose scientific value he ridiculously over-estimates; and he is sure to be very angry with anyone who tries rationally to combat his newly-found authority. Mathematical reasoners are especially liable to this form of incipient mental disease, which, when combined with the facial distortions already alluded to in a previous section, is peculiarly apt to terminate in acute dementia.'

'Acute dementia again!' Arthur Greatrex cried with a gesture of horror, flinging the book from him as if it were a poisonous serpent. 'Acute dementia, acute dementia, acute dementia; nothing but acute dementia ahead of me, whichever way I happen to turn. Oh, this is too horrible! I shall never be able to marry Hetty! And yet I shall never be able to break it to Hetty! Great heavens, that such a phantom as this should have risen between me and paradise only since this very morning!'

In his agony he caught up the papers on which he had written the rough draft of his grand discovery, and crumpled them up fiercely in his fingers. 'The cursed things!' he groaned between his teeth, tossing them with a gesture of impatient disgust into the waste-paper basket; 'how could I ever have deluded myself into thinking I had hit offhand upon a grand truth which had escaped such men as Helmholtz, and Mayer, and Joule, and Thomson! The thing's preposterous upon the very face of it; I must be going mad indeed ever to have dreamt of it!'

He took up his candle once more, kissed the portrait in the broken frame with intense fervour a dozen times over, and then went up gloomily into his own bedroom. There he did not attempt to undress, but merely pulled off his boots, lay down in his clothes upon the bed, and hastily blew out the candle. For a long time he lay tossing and turning in unspeakable terror; but at last, after perhaps two hours or so, he fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed a hideous nightmare, in which somebody or other in shadowy outlines was trying perpetually to tear him away by main force from poor pale and weeping Hetty.

It was daylight when Arthur woke again, and he lay for some time upon his bed, thinking over his last night's scare, which seemed much less serious, as such things always do, now that the sun had risen upon it. After a while his mind got round to the energy question; and, as he thought it over once more, the con-

viction forced itself afresh upon him that he was right upon the matter after all, and that if he was going mad there was at least method in his madness. So firmly was he convinced upon this point now (though he recognised that that very certainty might be merely a symptom of his coming malady) that he got up hurriedly, before the lodging-house servant came to clean up his little sitting-room, so as to rescue his crumpled foolscap from the waste-paper basket. After that, a bath and breakfast almost made him laugh at his evening terrors.

All the morning Arthur Greatrex sat down at his table again, working in the algebraical calculations which he had omitted from his paper overnight, and finishing it in full form as if for presentation to a learned society. But he did not mean now to offer it to any society: he had a far deeper and more personal interest in the matter at present than that. He wanted to settle first of all the question whether he was going mad or not. Afterwards, there would be plenty of time to settle such minor theoretical problems as the general physical constitution of the universe.

As soon as he had finished his calculations he took the paper in his hands, and went out with it to make two calls on scientific acquaintances. The first man he called upon was that distinguished specialist, Professor Linklight, one of the greatest authorities of his own day on all questions of molecular physics. Poor man! he is almost forgotten now, for he died ten years ago; and his scientific reputation was after all of that flashy sort which bases itself chiefly upon giving good dinners to leading fellows of the Royal Society. But fifteen years ago Professor Linklight, with his cut-and-dried dogmatic notions, and his narrow technical accuracy, was universally considered the principal physical philosopher in all England. To him, then, Arthur Greatrex—a far deeper and clearer thinker—took in all humility the first manuscript of his marvellous discovery; not to ask him whether it was true or not, but to find out whether it was physical science at all or pure insanity. The professor received him kindly; and when Arthur, who had of course his own reasons for attempting a little modest concealment, asked him to look over a friend's paper for him, with a view to its presentation to the Royal Society, he cheerfully promised to do his best. 'Though you will admit, my dear Mr. Greatrex,' he said with his blandest smile, 'that your friend's manuscript certainly does not err on the side of excessive brevity.'

From Linklight's Arthur walked on tremulously to the house of another great scientific magnate, Dr. Warminster, who shared with his friendly rival, Abury, the reputation of being the first living authority on the treatment of the insane in the United Kingdom. Before Dr. Warminster, Arthur made no attempt to conceal his apprehensions. He told out all his symptoms and fears without reserve, even exaggerating them a little, as a man is prone to do through over-anxiety not to put too favourable a face upon his own ailments. Dr. Warminster listened attentively and with a gathering interest to all that Arthur told him, and at the end of his account he shook his head gloomily, and answered in a very grave and sympathetic tone.

'My dear Greatrex,' he said gently, holding his arm with a kindly pressure, 'I should be dealing wrongly with you if I did not candidly tell you that your case gives ground for very serious apprehensions. You are a young man, and with steady attention to curative means and surroundings, it is possible that you may ward off this threatened danger. Society, amusement, relaxation, complete cessation of scientific work, absence, as far as possible, of mental anxiety in any form, may enable you to tide over the turning point. But that there is danger threatened, it would be unkind and untrue not to warn you. It is very unusual for a patient to consult us in person about these matters. More often it is the friends who notice the coming change; but, as you ask me directly for an opinion, I can't help telling you that I regard your case as not without real cause for the strictest care and for a preventive regimen.'

Arthur thanked him for the numerous directions he gave as to things which should be done or things which should be avoided, and hurried out into the street with his brain swimming and reeling. 'Absence of mental anxiety!' he said to himself bitterly. 'How calmly they talk about mental anxiety! How can I possibly be free from anxiety when I know I may go mad at any moment, and that the blow would kill Hetty outright? For myself, I should not care a farthing; but for Hetty! It is too terrible.'

He had not the heart to call at the Aburys' that afternoon, though he had promised to do so; and he tortured himself with the thought that Hetty would think him neglectful. He could not call again while the present suspense lasted; and if his worst fears were confirmed he could never call again, except once, to take leave of Hetty for ever. For, deeply as Arthur Greatrex

loved her, he loved her too well ever to dream of marrying her if the possible shadow of madness was to cloud her future life with its perpetual presence. Better she should bear the shock, even if it killed her at once, than that both should live in ceaseless apprehension of that horrible possibility, and should become the parents of children upon whom that hereditary curse might rest



for a lifetime, reflecting itself back with the added sting of conscientious remorse on the father who had brought them into the world against his own clear judgment of right and justice!

Next morning Arthur went round once more to Professor Linklight's. The professor had promised to read through the paper immediately, and give his opinion of its chances for presentation to the Royal Society. He was sitting at his breakfast-table, in his flowered dressing-gown and slippers, when Arthur

called upon him, and, with a cup of coffee in one hand, was actually skimming the last few pages through his critical eye-glass as his visitor entered.

'Good-morning, Mr. Greatrex!' he said, with one of his most gracious smiles, indicative of the warm welcome extended by acknowledged wisdom towards rising talent. 'You see I have been reading your friend's paper, as I promised. Well, my dear sir, not to put too fine a point upon it, it won't hold water. In fact, it's a mere rigmarole. Excuse my asking you, Greatrex, but have you any idea, my dear fellow, whether your friend is inclined to be a little cracky?'

Arthur swallowed a groan with the greatest difficulty, and answered in as unconcerned a tone as possible, 'Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Linklight, some doubts *have* been cast upon his perfect sanity.'

'Ah, I should have thought so,' the professor went on in his airiest manner; 'I should have thought so. The fact is, this paper is fitter for the *Transactions* of the Colney Hatch Academy than for those of the Royal Society. It has a delusive outer appearance of physical thinking, but there's no real meaning in it of any sort. It's gassy, unsubstantial, purely imaginative.' And the professor waved his hand in the air to indicate its utter gaseousness. 'If you were to ask my own opinion about it, I should say it's the sort of thing that might be produced by a young man of some mathematical training, with a very superficial knowledge of modern physics, just as he was on the point of lapsing into complete insanity. It's the maddest bit of writing that has ever yet fallen under my critical notice.'

'Your opinion is of course conclusive,' Arthur answered with unfeigned humility, his eyes almost bursting with the tears he would not let come to the surface. 'It will be a great disappointment to my friend, but I have no doubt he will accept your verdict.'

'Not a bit of it, my dear sir,' the professor put in quickly. 'Not a bit of it. These crazy fellows always stick to their own opinions, and think you a perfect fool for disagreeing with them. Mark my words, Mr. Greatrex, your friend will still go on believing, in spite of everything, that his round-about reasoning upon that preposterous square-root-of-Pi theorem is sound mathematics.'

And Arthur, looking within, felt with a glow of horror that the theorem in question seemed to him at that moment more obviously true and certain in all its deductions than it had ever

done before since the first day that he conceived it. How very mad he must be after all.

He thanked Professor Linklight as well as he was able for his kindness in looking over the paper, and groped his way blindly through the passage to the front door and out into the square. Thence he staggered home wearily, convinced that it was all over between him and Hetty, and that he must make up his mind forthwith to his horrible destiny.

If he had only known at that moment that forty years earlier Professor Linklight had used almost the same words about Young's theory of undulations, and had since used them about every new discovery from that day to the one on which he then saw him, he might have attached less importance than he actually did to this supposed final proof of his own insanity.

As Arthur entered his lodgings he hung his hat up on the stand in the passage. There was a little strip of mirror in the middle of the stand, and glancing at it casually he saw once more that awful face—his own—distorted and almost diabolical, which he had learnt so soon to hate instinctively as if it were a felon's and a murderer's. He rushed away wildly into his little sitting-room, and flung his manuscript on the table, almost without observing that his friend Freeling, the rising young physiologist, was quietly seated on the sofa opposite.

'What's this, Arthur?' Freeling asked, taking it up carelessly and glancing at the title. 'You don't mean to say that you've finally written out that splendid idea of yours about the inter-relations of energy?'

'Yes, I have, Harry; I have, and I wish to Heaven I hadn't, for it's all mad and silly and foolish and meaningless!'

'If it is, then I'm mad too, my dear fellow, for I think it's the most convincing thing in physics I ever listened to. Let me have the manuscript to look over, and see how you've worked out those beautiful calculations about the square root of Pi, will you?'

'Take the thing, for heaven's sake, and leave me, Harry, for if I'm not left alone I shall break down and cry before you.' And as he spoke he buried his head in his arm and sobbed like a woman.

Dr. Freeling knew Arthur was in love, and was aware that people sometimes act very unaccountably under such circumstances; so he did the wisest thing to be done then and there: he grasped his friend's arm gently with his hand, spoke never a

word, and, taking up his hat and the manuscript, walked quietly out into the passage. Then he told the landlady to make Mr. Greatrex a strong cup of tea, with a dash of brandy in it, and turned away, leaving Arthur to solitude and his own reflections.

That evening's post brought Arthur Greatrex two letters, which finally completed his utter prostration. The first he opened was from Dr. Abury. He broke the envelope with a terrible misgiving, and read the letter through with a deepening and sickening feeling of horror. It was not he alone, then, who had distorted the secret of his own incipient insanity. Dr. Abury's practised eye had also detected the rising symptoms. The doctor wrote kindly and with evident grief; but there was no mistaking the firm purport of his intentions. Conferring this morning with his professional friend Warminster, a case had been mentioned to him, without a name, which he at once recognised as Arthur's. He recalled certain symptoms he had himself observed, and his suspicions were thus vividly aroused. Happening accidentally to follow Arthur in the street he was convinced that his surmise was correct, and he thought it his duty both to inform Arthur of the danger that encompassed him, and to assure him that, deeply as it grieved him to withdraw the consent he had so gladly given, he could not allow his only daughter to marry a man bearing on his face the evident marks of an insane tendency. The letter contained much more of regret and condolence; but that was the pith that Arthur Greatrex picked out of it all through the blinding tears that dimmed his vision.

The second letter was from Hetty. Half guessing its contents, he had left it purposely till the last, and he tore it open now with a fearful sinking feeling in his bosom. It was, indeed, a heart-broken, heart-breaking letter. What could be the secret which papa would not tell her? Why had not Arthur come yesterday? Why could she never marry him? Why was papa so cruel as not to tell her the reason? He couldn't have done anything in the slightest degree dishonourable, far less anything wicked: of that she felt sure; but, if not, what could be this horrible, mysterious, unknown barrier that was so suddenly raised between them? 'Do write, dearest Arthur, and relieve me from this terrible, incomprehensible suspense; do let me know what has happened to make papa so determined against you. I could bear to lose you—at least, I could bear it as other women have done—but I can't bear this awful uncertainty, this awful doubt as to your love or

your constancy. For heaven's sake, darling, send me a note somehow! send me a line to tell me you love me. Your heart-broken

‘HETTY.’

Arthur took his hat, and, unable to endure this agony, set out at once for the Aburys'. When he reached the door, the servant who answered his ring at the bell told him he could not see the doctor; he was engaged with two other doctors in a consultation about Miss Hetty. What was the matter with Miss Hetty, then? What, didn't he know that? Oh, Miss Hetty had had a fit, and Dr. Freeling and Dr. MacKinlay had been called in to see her. Arthur did not wait for a moment, but walked upstairs unannounced, and into the consulting room.

Was it a very serious matter? Yes, Freeling answered, very serious. It seemed Miss Abury had had a great shock—a great shock to her affections—which, he added in a lower voice, ‘you yourself can perhaps best explain to me. She will certainly have a long illness. Perhaps she may never recover.’

‘Come out into the conservatory, Harry,’ said Arthur to his friend. ‘I can tell you there what it is all about.’

In a few words Arthur told him the nature of the shock, but without describing the particular symptoms on which the opinion of his supposed approaching insanity was based. Freeling listened with an incredulous smile, and at the end he said to his friend gently, ‘My dear Arthur, I wish you had told me all this before. If you had done so, we might have saved Miss Abury a shock which may perhaps be fatal. You are no more going mad than I am; on the contrary, you're about the sanest and most clear-headed fellow of my acquaintance. But these mad-doctors are always finding madness everywhere. If you had come to me and told me the symptoms that troubled you, I should soon have set you right again in your own opinion. To have gone to Warminster was most unfortunate, but it can't be helped now. What we have to do at present is to take care of Miss Abury.’

Arthur shook his head sadly. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘you don't know the real gravity of the symptoms I am suffering from. I shall tell you all about them some other time. However, as you say, what we have to think about now is Hetty. Can you let me see her? I am sure if I could see her it would reassure her and do her good.’

Dr. Abury was at first very unwilling to let Arthur visit Hetty, who was now lying unconscious on the sofa in her own boudoir;

but Freeling's opinion that it might possibly do her good at last prevailed with him, and he gave his permission grudgingly.

Arthur went into the room silently and took his seat beside the low couch where the motherless girl was lying. Her face was very white, and her hands pale and bloodless. He took one hand in his: the pulse was hardly perceptible. He laid it down upon her breast, and leaned back to watch for any sign of returning life in her pallid cheek and closed eyelids.

For hours and hours he sat there watching, and no sign came. Dr. Abury sat at the bottom of the couch, watching with him; and as they watched, Arthur felt from time to time that his face was again twitching horribly. However, he had only thoughts for one thing now: would Hetty die or would she recover? The servants brought them a little cake and wine. They sat and drank in silence, looking at one another, but each absorbed in his own thoughts, and speaking never a word for good or evil.

At last Hetty's eyes opened. Arthur noticed the change first, and took her hand in his gently. Her staring gaze fell upon him for a moment, and she asked feebly, 'Arthur, Arthur, do you still love me?'

'Love you, Hetty? With all my heart and soul, as I have always loved you!'

She smiled, and said nothing. Dr. Abury gave her a little wine in a teaspoon, and she drank it quietly. Then she shut her eyes again, but this time she was sleeping.

All night Arthur watched still by the bedside where they put her a little later, and Dr. Abury and a nurse watched with him. In the morning she woke slightly better, and when she saw Arthur still there, she smiled again, and said that if he was with her, she was happy. When Freeling came to inquire after the patient, he found her so much stronger, and Arthur so worn with fear and sleeplessness, that he insisted upon carrying off his friend in his brougham to his own house, and giving him a slight restorative. He might come back at once, he said; but only after he had had a dose of mixture, a glass of brandy and seltzer, and at least a mouthful of something for breakfast.

As Freeling was drawing the cork of the seltzer, Arthur's eye happened to light on a monkey, which was chained to a post in the little area plot outside the consulting-room. Arthur was accustomed to see monkeys there, for Freeling often had invalids

from the Zoo to observe side by side with human patients ; but this particular monkey fascinated him even in his present shattered state of nerves, because there was a something in its face which seemed strangely and horribly familiar to him. As he looked, he recognised with a feeling of unspeakable aversion what it was of which the monkey reminded him. It was making a series of hideous and apparently mocking grimaces—the very self-same grimaces which he had seen on his own features in the mirror during the last day or two ! Horrible idea ! He was descending to the level of the very monkeys !

The more he watched, the more absolutely identical the two sets of grimaces appeared to him to be. Could it be fancy or was it reality ? Or might it be one more delusion, showing that his brain was now giving way entirely ? He rubbed his eyes, steadied his attention, and looked again with the deepest interest. No, he could not be mistaken. The monkey was acting in every respect precisely as he himself had acted.

‘Harry,’ he said, in a low and frightened tone, ‘look at this monkey. Is he mad ? Tell me.’

‘My dear Arthur,’ replied his friend, with just a shade of expostulation in his voice, ‘you have really got madness on the brain at present. No, he isn’t mad at all. He’s as sane as you are, and that’s saying a good deal, I can assure you.’

‘But, Harry, you can’t have seen what he’s doing. He’s grimacing and contorting himself in the most extraordinary fashion.’

‘Well, monkeys often do grimace, don’t they ?’ Harry Freeling answered coolly. ‘Take this brandy and you’ll soon feel better.’

‘But they don’t grimace like this one,’ Arthur persisted.

‘No, not like this one, certainly. That’s why I’ve got him here. I’m going to operate upon him for it under chloroform, and cure him immediately.’

Arthur leaped from his seat like one demented. ‘Operate upon him, cure him !’ he cried hastily. ‘What on earth do you mean, Harry ?’

‘My dear boy, don’t be so excited,’ said Freeling. ‘This suspense and sleeplessness have been too much for you. This is anti-vivisection carried *ad absurdum*. You don’t mean to say you object to operations upon a monkey for his own benefit, do you ? If I don’t cut a nerve, tetanus will finally set in, and he’ll die of it in great agony. Drink off your brandy, and you’ll feel better after it.’

'But, Harry, what's the matter with the monkey? For heaven's sake, tell me!'

Harry Freeling looked at his friend for the first time a little suspiciously. Could Warminster be right after all, and could Arthur really be going mad? It was so ridiculous of him to get into such a state of flurry about the ailments of a tame monkey, and at such a moment, too! 'Well,' he answered slowly, 'the monkey has got facial distortions due to a slight local paralysis of the inhibitory nerves supplied to the buccal and pharyngeal muscles, with a tendency to end in tetanus. If I cut a small ganglion behind the ear, and exhibit santonin, the muscles will be relaxed; and though they won't act so freely as before, they won't jerk and grimace any longer.'

'Does it ever occur in human beings?' Arthur asked eagerly.

'Occur in human beings? Bless my soul, yes! I've seen dozens of cases. Why, goodness gracious, Arthur, it's positively occurring in your own face at this very moment!'

'I know it is,' Arthur answered in an agony of suspense. 'Do you think this twitching of mine is due to a local paralysis of the inhibitories, such as you speak of?'

'Excuse my laughing, my dear fellow; you really do look so absurdly comical. No, I don't think anything about it. I know it is.'

'Then you believe Warminster was wrong in taking it for a symptom of incipient insanity?'

It was Freeling's turn now to jump up in surprise. 'You don't mean to tell me, Arthur, that that was the sole ground on which that old fool, Warminster, thought you were going crazy?'

'He didn't see it himself,' answered Arthur, with a sigh of unspeakable relief. 'I only described it to him, and he drew his inference from what I told him. But the real question is this, Harry: Do you feel quite sure that there's nothing more than that the matter with me?'

'Absolutely certain, my dear fellow. I can cure you in half an hour. I've done it dozens of times before, and know the thing as well as you know an ordinary case of scarlet fever.'

Arthur sighed again. 'And perhaps,' he said bitterly, 'this terrible mistake may cost dear Hetty her life!'

He drank off the brandy, ate a few mouthfuls of food as best he might, and hastened back to the Aburys'. When he got there he learned from the servant that Hetty was at least no worse;

and with that negative comfort he had for the moment to content himself.

Hetty's illness was long and serious; but before it was over Freeling was able to convince Dr. Abury of his own and his colleague's error, and to prove by a simple piece of surgery that Arthur's hideous grimaces were due to nothing worse than a purely physical impediment. The operation was quite a successful one; but though Greatrex's face has never since been liable to these curious contortions, the consequent relaxation of the muscles has given his features that peculiarly calm and almost impassive expression which everybody must have noticed upon them at the present day, even in moments of the greatest animation. The difficulty was how to break the cause of the temporary mistake to Hetty, and this they were unable to do until she was to a great extent convalescent. When once the needful explanation was over, and Arthur was able once more to kiss her with perfect freedom from any tinge of suspicion on her part, he felt that his paradise was at last attained.

A few days before the deferred date fixed for their wedding, Freeling came into the doctor's drawing-room, where Hetty and Arthur were sitting together, and threw a letter with a French official stamp on its face down upon the table. 'There,' he said, 'I find all the members of the Académie des Sciences at Paris are madmen also!'

Hetty smiled faintly, and said with a little earnestness in her tone, 'Ah, Dr. Freeling, that subject has been far too serious a one for both of us to make it pleasant jesting.'

'Oh, but look here, Miss Abury,' said Freeling; 'I have to apologise to Arthur for a great liberty I have ventured to take, and I think it best to begin by explaining to you wherein it consisted. The fact is, before you were ill, Arthur had just written a paper on the interrelations of energy, which he showed to that pompous old nincompoop, Professor Linklight. Well, Linklight being one of those men who can never see an inch beyond his own nose, had the incomprehensible stupidity to tell him there was nothing in it. Thereupon your future husband, who is a modest and self-depreciating sort of fellow, was minded to throw it incontinently into the waste-paper basket. But a friend of his, Harry Freeling, who flatters himself that he *can* see an inch or two beyond his own nose, read it over, and recognised that it was a brilliant discovery. So what does he go and do—here comes

in the apologetic matter—but get this memoir quietly translated into French, affix a motto to it, put it in an envelope, and send it in for the gold medal competition of the Académie. Strange to say, the members of the Académie turned out to be every bit



as mad as the author and his friend ; for I have just received this letter, addressed to Arthur at my house (which I have taken the further liberty of opening), and it informs me that the Académie decrees its gold medal for physical discovery to M. Arthur Greatrex, of London, which is a subject of congratula-

tion for us three, and a regular slap in the face for pompous old Linklight.'

Hetty seized Freeling's two hands in hers. 'You have been our good genius, Dr. Freeling,' she said with brimming eyes. 'I owe Arthur to you; and Arthur owes me to you; and now we both owe you this. What can we ever do to thank you sufficiently?'

Since those days Hetty and Arthur have long been married, and Dr. Greatrex's famous work (in its enlarged form) has been translated into all the civilised languages of the world, as well as into German; but to this moment, happy as they both are, you can read in their faces the lasting marks of that one terrible anxiety. To many of their friends it seemed afterwards a mere laughing matter; but to those two, who went through it, and especially to Arthur Greatrex, it is a memory too painful to be looked back upon even now without a thrill of terrible recollection.

SOME LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS.

VII.

It was in 1856 that I first made the personal acquaintance of Charles Dickens—a circumstance which to me was an epoch in my existence. Like all young persons devoted to literature, I had had my idols. As a boy I used to have visions of untold wealth, with the power of laying it at the feet of this or that writer, sometimes to be used for the amelioration of the human race (I had often given Thomas Carlyle a million or two, in trust, for that purpose), and sometimes for their own benefit. Tennyson I had thus enriched beyond the dreams of avarice; Browning I had made exceedingly comfortable; but the chief figure in my literary Pantheon had been always Dickens.

For one thing (though that was not the chief thing), he had given me more pleasure than any writer—a circumstance which I have noticed often arouses no personal gratitude: when a book pleases ordinary folks, they no more think of the author than when a landscape pleases them they think of Him who made it; but with bookworms, even of the most superficial type, the heart warms to the man.

My late friend Calverly, the C.S.C. of *Poems and Translations* and *Fly Leaves*, when lecturer of Christ College, issued a paper on *Pickwick* after the model of the usual classical examination papers, containing the most out-of-the-way details, and forming a crucial test of scholarship. He was so good as to oblige me with a copy of it, only a few weeks before his lamented and unexpected death, and gave me permission to make use of it in these Reminiscences. Little did I think at the time that he himself would find any place in them as one who had joined the majority. He was my junior by some years, so that I had not the privilege of knowing him at Cambridge, but in after-years I often met him. We were neighbours at Grasmere for a whole summer, when I saw a great deal of him. His classical attainments were of course far beyond me, but not more so than his physical gifts. He was the best runner and jumper I ever knew; but my admiration never led me to imitate him. Nevertheless in company with W. and S., his almost equally

athletic friends, and himself, I was once persuaded to climb Scawfell from Wastwater. They went up it like mountain cats, while I (like panting Time) toiled after them in vain. 'The labour we delight in *physics* Payn,' was his appropriate quotation.

On another occasion S. and he were returning with me very late one night, on foot, from some 'sports' at Ambleside, where somebody, I am afraid, entered himself as a competitor for the mile race as William Whewell, Trinity College, Cambridge, under which name he afterwards appeared among the winners in the local paper. It was exceedingly dark, and being very near-sighted I found it difficult to keep up with them, and was constantly denouncing them for the pace they put on. 'Now, S.,' cried Calverly (whose spirits were always those of a schoolboy), 'let us break away from this abusive miscreant, hide in the wood yonder, and pretend to be robbers.' And off they went. Their abominable intention was to ambush in the wooded pass between Rydal an' Grasmere, and jump out upon me where it was darkest. But though scant of wind I was not destitute of intelligence. I found, with difficulty, the short cut over the hill, by the Wishing Gate, which they had left out of their calculations, and, while they still lay in the thicket bent on their nefarious scheme, their proposed victim was at home in his bed.

Whenever I think of Calverly I think of fun and good fellowship; of the 'wild joys of living; the leaping from rock up to rock; the cool silver shock of the plunge in the pool's living water;' of health and youth and strength. Alas, alas!

Here are some extracts from the famous examination paper.

Christ's College, Christmas, 1857.

THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE PICKWICK CLUB.

1. Mention any occasions on which it is specified that the Fat Boy was *not* asleep; and that (1) Mr. Pickwick and (2) Mr. Weller, senr., ran. Deduce from expressions used on one occasion Mr. Pickwick's maximum of speed.

3. Who were Mr. Staple, Goodwin, Mr. Brooks, Villam, Mrs. Bunkin; 'old Nobs,' 'cast-iron head,' 'young Bantam'?

9. Describe the common Profeel-machine.

10. State the component parts of Dog's-nose; and simplify the expression taking a grinder.'

11. On finding his principal in the Pound, Mr. Weller and the town-beadle varied directly. Show that the latter was ultimately eliminated, and state the number of rounds in the square which is not described.

12. 'Anything for air and exercise; as the very old donkey observed ven they voke him up from his deathbed to carry ten gen'lmen to Greenwich in a tax-cart.' Illustrate this by stating any remark recorded in the Pickwick Papers to have

been made by a (previously) dumb animal, with the circumstances under which he made it.

17 Give Weller's Theories for the Extraction of Mr. Pickwick from the Fleet Where was his wife's will found?

18. How did the old lady make memorandum, and of what, at what? Shew that there were at least three times as many fiddles as harps in Muggleton at the time of the ball at Manor Farm.

23. 'She's a swelling wisely.' When did the same phenomenon occur again and what fluid caused the pressure on the body in the latter case?

24. How did Mr. Weller, senior, define the Funds; and what view did he take of Reduced Consols? In what terms is his elastic force described when he assaulted Mr. Stiggins at the Meeting? Write down the name of the Meeting.

25. "προβατογνώμων: 'A good judge of cattle; hence, a good judge of character.'" Note on Æsch. Ag.—Illustrate the theory involved by a remark of the parent Weller.

30. Who, besides Mr. Pickwick, is recorded to have worn gaiters?

The prizes were a 'first edition' of *Pickwick*, and it will be interesting to many to learn that the two prizemen were Walter Besant and Professor Skeat. If *Pickwick* were to-day made a text-book for 'exams.' in general, the replies would no doubt be satisfactory, for there is now a concordance for the whole of Dickens; but in 1857 there was no need of cramming, for every one knew the book and quoted it. I have the vanity to believe, had I been qualified as a candidate, I should have gained a prize: at all events, I had my Dickens at my fingers' ends, and the notion of feeling him there in the flesh—of shaking hands with him—was positively intoxicating. He came to Edinburgh to give his public readings for the first time, and had little time to spare of course for private intercourse. On the evening after his arrival he was so good, however, as to propose a meeting.

'The hours and days,' he writes, 'run away while I am thus occupied, so imperceptibly that I do nothing that I propose to myself to do. I thought we should have walked ten miles together by this time. To-morrow morning I am going to take my daughters out to Hawthornden, and it occurs to me to ask if you could spare time to go with us on the expedition.'

If I had had only twenty-four hours to live I should have 'spared time' for such a purpose, which did not indeed seem to trench upon my earthly span at all, but to be a foretaste of Paradise. Such enthusiasm is unknown in these days, wherein Dickens himself, as an American writer informs us, 'is no longer to be endured,'¹ and will doubtless excite some ridicule; but for my part

¹ The statement in a recent publication that '4,239,000 volumes of Dickens's works have been sold in England alone since his death,' seems to be at variance with this gentleman's view.

I am not one whit ashamed of it. Nay, contemptible as the confession may appear, I feel the same love and admiration for Charles Dickens now as I did then. What indeed astonished even me, I remember, at the time, was that personal acquaintance with him increased rather than diminished his marvellous attraction for me. In general society, especially if it has been of an artificial kind, I have known his manner to betray some sense of effort, but in the company of those with whom he could feel at home, I have never met a man more natural or more charming. He never wasted time in commonplaces—though a lively talker, he never uttered a platitude—and what he had to say he said as if he meant it. On an occasion, which many of my readers will call to mind, he once spoke of himself as ‘very human’: he did so, of course, in a depreciatory sense; he was the last person in the world to affect to possess any other nature than that of his fellows. When some one said, ‘How wicked the world is!’ he answered, ‘True; and what a satisfaction it is that neither you nor I belong to it.’ But the fact is, it was this very humanity which was his charm. Whatever there was of him was real without padding; and whatever was genuine in others had a sympathetic attraction for him.

The subject, however, which most interested him (and, in a less degree, this was also the case with Thackeray) was the dramatic—nay, even the melodramatic—side of human nature. He had stories without end, taken from the very page of life, of quite a different kind from those with which he made his readers familiar. There are, indeed, indications of this tendency in his writings, as in the tales interspersed in *Pickwick*, in the abandoned commencement of *Humphrey's Clock*, and more markedly in his occasional sketches, but they were much more common in his private talk.

When visiting the exhibition of Hablot Browne's pictures the other day I was much struck by the fact that, when indulging his own taste, the subjects chosen by the artist were not humorous, but sombre and eerie. This, I feel sure, was what made him so acceptable an illustrator to Dickens. He could not only depict humorous scenes with feeling, but also such grim imaginings as the old Roman looking down on dead Mr. Tulkynghorn, and the Ghost Walk at Chesney Wold. The mind of Dickens, which most of his readers picture to themselves as revelling in sunshine, was in fact more attracted to the darker side of life, though there was far too much of geniality in him to permit it to become morbid.

On the occasion of our first meeting, however, I saw nothing of all this: he was full of fun and brightness, and in five minutes I felt as much at my ease with him as though I had known him as long as I had known his books. It was not one of the days on which Hawthornden was open to the public, and we had much difficulty in obtaining admittance at the lodge; and when we got to the house we were detained there again, and there was a difficulty about seeing the glen. I went within doors and expostulated, but for a long time without success: the inmates, I am sorry to say, did not seem to be acquainted with Dickens's name—a circumstance which, though it would only have made him laugh the more, I did not venture to disclose. The fancy picture which he drew of my detention in that feudal abode, and of the mediæval tortures which had probably been inflicted upon me, made ample amends, however, for what I had suffered on behalf of the party. In the end, we saw all that was to be seen; and never shall I forget the face of the hereditary guide and gatekeeper when Dickens tipped him in his usual lavish manner. This retainer had not thought much of him before—indeed, had obviously never heard of him—but his salute at parting could not have been more deferential had the author of *Pickwick* been the Lord of the Isles. The humours of the day must have made some impression upon Dickens himself, for in a letter two years afterwards he reminds me of the imprisonment I had suffered for his sake in the gloomy cells of Hawthornden. Late that night I supped with him—after his reading—at his hotel, alone; after which I discarded for ever the picture which I had made in my mind of him, and substituted for it a still pleasanter one, taken from life.

In the following year I published my first book, a collection of 'Stories and Sketches,' taken from my contributions to *Household Words* and *Chambers's Journal*. I have often been asked by young authors whether 'it pays' to republish such articles. Directly, it certainly does not pay, for the venture is almost always a pecuniary loss; but indirectly, if the articles are really good, it is very remunerative. It introduces the writer not only to the public (who, of course, have hitherto never heard of him), but to editors in general, who thus obtain a good specimen of his powers. In old days this system of advertising one's literary wares was not so common as at present: it was generally resorted to only by geniuses in humble life whose works were published by subscription; and whatever advantages they derived from the system

were more than counterbalanced by the latter fact. One of them, who afterwards became very famous, observed to me that he had bought his first reputation at a much higher price than those who had paid for it—*i.e.* who had published at their own expense. 'Every one who subscribed five shillings to that book of mine is in a position to say that but for him I should never have been heard of; and about two out of three do say so.' But this is only to admit that the possession of spare cash in literature is as useful as it is in all other professions.

Before leaving this subject, I should add, for fear of being thought to recommend the 'rushing into print,' that while many writers have been benefited by early publication, quite as many (even of those who have afterwards made their mark in the world) have lived to repent it. In youth—though I think this is not the case with us in maturity—we are not such good judges of our own work as other people; we are apt to make comparisons between it and that of other writers, instead of estimating its intrinsic worth, which alone ought to guide us.*

My next book was a narrative of school and college life, called the *Foster Brothers*, which had a very fair success, and was republished, as everything I subsequently wrote has been, in America. They have also been translated into various languages. Perhaps nothing gives a young author so much pleasure as to see the product of his brain in a foreign tongue, even though (as in my case) he cannot read it. To the satisfaction I derived from the *Foster Brothers* there was, however, a terrible drawback, in the form of a most scathing notice in the *Saturday Review*. It was headed—on account of certain democratic opinions the volume had displayed—the 'Bloated Aristocracy,' and made me most thoroughly miserable. The writer, now one of her Majesty's judges, has laughed with me since about it, but I am never so tickled with the reminiscence as he is. I have a great personal regard for him, but note with pleasure that the newspapers describe him as 'a hanging judge.'

In acknowledging the receipt of this book in his usual kind and cordial manner, Dickens misspells it *Forster Brothers*, and apolo-

* A similar feeling causes some contributors to endeavour to recommend themselves to the notice of an editor in the following conciliatory manner: 'Without self-flattery, I think I may venture to say that the paper I send to you, however modest in merit, is at all events superior to the majority of the articles in your esteemed magazine.'

gises for the mistake by saying 'this is because I am always thinking of my friend John Forster.' I afterwards received (as will be mentioned in its proper place) a still more curious proof of his devotion to one whom, from many points of view, one would have judged to be little in sympathy with him.

By this time I had made some success as a writer of lively sketches and humorous articles; rejection, so far as they were concerned, had become as rare with me as acceptance had formerly been; and my aspirations began to be more ambitious. It struck me that I might one day write a successful novel. This is not quite so easy, however, as to express your opinion about a novel written by somebody else. The proper construction of such a work comes by experience, and never by intuition: when a young writer attempts it, he succeeds at best in writing a narrative and not a novel; he takes a character, generally more or less like himself, and describes his career from the cradle to the altar, which he considers to be equivalent to the grave. It is in fact an autobiography of a person of whom no one has ever heard, and the only chance therefore for its success is that the incidents in the hero's life should be of a striking kind.

Fortune was so good as to favour me with quite a pattern hero for this purpose, in a gentleman who had achieved a reputation as a tamer of wild beasts. What his real name was I never knew, but his professional one was, if not romantic, at least remarkable. It was Tickerocandua. I made his acquaintance when visiting a travelling menagerie of which he was the pride and ornament, and we became very friendly. His life up to the time he had entered upon his present dangerous calling had been uneventful enough; but I perceived in him the materials of excellent 'copy.' I thought that he would make a capital example of a family scape-grace, of pluck and spirit, who, more sinned against than sinning, had run away from his friends and taken to tiger-taming. On every lawful day, as the Scotch phrase runs, he was engaged with his animals—witching the world with feats compared with which the noblest horsemanship sank into insignificance. So he came to supper with me on a Sunday. Our little servant-maid's difficulty in announcing him as 'Mr. Tickerocandua' was considerable; and when he began to talk of his tooth-and-claw experiences, I thought her eyes would have come out of her head. He was the politest person I ever met with, for, having helped himself to oil (thinking it to be white vinegar) with his oysters, he

consumed them without a syllable of complaint, and even with apparent relish.

This gentleman was so good as to show me his left shoulder scarred in a hundred places by the claws of the leopards as they 'took off' it every day in their leaps, during the 'unparalleled performance of the wild leopard hunt.' He had the mark of a bite on his arm which cost a lion its life, and his proprietor three hundred pounds. 'It was a case of which was to go,' he said—'the lion or me—and I struck him over the nose with my loaded whip handle.' There is only one principle by which the wild beast world can be ruled, he told me—that of fear; and should one of them once cease to fear him, he added, his life would not have been worth an hour's purchase. He had been twice dragged off insensible from an abortive performance of 'the Tiger King,' and only preserved from being torn to pieces by the interposition of a red-hot bar; yet directly he recovered himself in he went again, whip in hand, and subdued the beasts. 'It was simply a question of showing myself their master then and there, or of giving up my situation.' He gave me these details (which were afterwards corroborated by the evidence of others) with great simplicity, and without the least approach to boastfulness; and they interested me immensely. When this is the case with any subject, I have always found—after due consideration of the matter—that I can make it interesting to my readers, and in the *Family Scapegrace* I scored my first success. It came out originally in serial form—as every novel I have ever written has also done—and has passed through many editions, but I believe it is as popular to-day as it was twenty years ago. For me, however, it has always a melancholy association, for the brave young fellow who suggested it to me met, in the end, with the fate which he had so long tempted. He was not indeed, like the bad boy in the fable, absolutely 'eaten by lions,' but he was killed by a stroke of the paw of one, though the blow, I believe, was not given in malice. I am not sure whether the publication of the *Family Scapegrace* in the columns of the *Journal* increased its circulation, but it was certainly well received. Mr. William Chambers, however, objected to it upon the ground of its 'lightness.' He would have preferred the subject of wild beasts to have been more 'intelligently treated'; their various habitats to be described, and some sort of moral to be deduced from them; but Robert stuck loyally to his young friend and his story.

I took infinite pleasure in my editorial occupation, and had every reason to be content with my surroundings. My family, however, were delicate, the climate of Edinburgh proved too vigorous for their constitutions, and after a year or two I was compelled to announce my intention of going south. Robert Chambers was so good as to express himself much concerned at this resolve, and characteristically endeavoured to combat it, upon the firm ground of science. 'You talk of cold, my dear sir, but let me tell you that the thermal line is precisely the same in Edinburgh as it is in London.' I replied, with as great truth as modesty, that I knew nothing about the thermal line, but that so far as I was aware the east wind had never blown a four-wheeled cab over in London—a circumstance which happened to have just taken place opposite our house in Edinburgh. As he saw my resolution was quite fixed, he presently said with a kind smile, 'I am thinking of going to live in London myself; suppose we go together, and you shall edit the *Journal* there instead of here.' Which struck me as a most excellent arrangement. The only drawback to my satisfaction was an undertaking I now entered into to confine my contributions to the *Journal* only. It was not, indeed, an unreasonable requirement on his part, while it was in some sort a compliment to myself; but I regretted that my literary connection with *Household Words*, or rather with its chief, which had been so long and constant, was now to cease; that I was no longer to serve under the banner of him whom Bret Hart, in the most imperishable of his stories, has called 'The Master.' I wrote, of course, to tell him of the arrangement. 'I have received your letter,' he replied, 'with mingled regret and pleasure. I am heartily sorry to have lost you as a fellow-workman, but heartily glad to have gained you as a friend. . . . I hope that you will both [my wife and myself] come and see us at Gadshill, and compare the Kentish hops and cherries with the Scottish peachings.'

JUNE FISHING.

OF all the months in the British year, we say that 'leafy June' is the happy time for the angler—for the rational angler, we mean, who follows the sport by way of enjoying the beauties and the pleasures of the country. We own to having slight sympathy—save so far as sympathy means compassion—with the enthusiast who fishes simply for the sake of killing, in season and out of season; and a picturesque and most pathetic article might be written on the sorrows of these voluntary martyrs. Some of our readers may remember an old picture in *Punch*, where an elderly gentleman in greatcoat and heavy throat-mufflers stands shivering behind his fishing-rod over a frozen pond, where the ice has been broken to give play to the bait. A labourer working on the brink hard by, is jarring his shoulders with each concussion of the pickaxe; and the subscription is, 'The pike is a voracious fish and bites very readily in the winter months.' That is undoubtedly an extreme instance of anglomania; and yet we can recall others within our own experience that very nearly parallel it. We have travelled down to Scotland, for example, in the beginning of the year, when the thermometer in the morning had fallen many degrees below freezing; when the winds had been fast screwed in the quarter of the east; when the thickest rugs were in request, and tepid footwarmers at a premium, and when our notion of comfort, fond of fishing as we are, was a cosy arm-chair in a well-warmed library. And the acquaintance who stepped into our carriage on that occasion was a gentleman fast descending the vale of years, who had spent the better part of his life in tropical climates. He shivered beneath his wrappings, and, moreover, he was shaken by a violent cough. Nevertheless, in defiance of death and rheumatism, he was bound for his fishing quarters somewhere above Berwick; for on the morrow the rod-fishing was to open on the Tweed, and no doctor could induce him to miss the beginning of the season. *De gustibus non disputandum*; but we could not help pitying the enthusiast. Admitting that salmon-fishing ranks with fox-hunting and deer-stalking; and sympathizing with the thrill of excitement when a twenty-pounder runs away with your line, we naturally pictured

our venerable friend in the pursuit of his 'pleasure,' twenty-four hours afterwards. Was it really in human nature to enjoy the stinging winds powdered with hail-dust and snow flakes; while the waters of the river rolled 'gurly' and grey, beneath barren banks and lowering heavens. Early spring fishing in Scotland may be all very well for the keeper, who is as weather-proof as one of his own shaggy terriers, who can stroll down from his cottage to 'the water,' to 'try a cast' when circumstances seem likely to repay him; but as for the man who is tied to take the value out of a highly-rented stretch of stream, he appears to us to court gratuitous torments. May, of course, ought to be an agreeable fishing month; but we know by melancholy experience its too frequent character. After the deceptive weather of some genial days in April, playful nature is taking a bitter revenge. The blossoms of unwary wildflowers are shrivelling on the banks: while the May-fly, with an intelligence that rational beings would do well to imitate, has no idea of putting in a premature appearance. And yet there are men, and valetudinarians, who will go in for their annual spring outing, with a box of cough-lozenges in one pocket balancing the bulging flyhook in the other; and who come home to put themselves in training for the next day's work by supping lightly on water-gruel and plunging the feet in hot water. We might appreciate their resolution were the trout rising freely. But, as a matter of fact, they toil all the day for next to nothing, since even the chronic cold has been caught already. We say nothing of the sufferings of the more adventurous brethren of the craft, who make heavy hauls of salmon in Scandinavia or Labrador, when the air that ought to be limpid is laden with flies, and the sunset is darkened with clouds of mosquitoes. In vain do they muffle their heads in gauze, smearing both face and hands with poisonous decoctions. The venomous mosquitoes will bite in spite of the croton oil; and when the fisherman returns to the haunts of civilization, he seems to be stricken with a loathsome leprosy.

But angling in our English June is a different thing altogether. Then the love of nature tempts you to the country, and you only want some pursuit that shall give a zest to your rambles. For that, there is nothing in the world like fishing; the rod being the young man's best companion, while, like the golfing club, it is a crutch to extreme old age. Even now there is nothing we look back to with so much pleasure as our earliest angling reminis-

cences. Our elders were shy of trusting us with a gun; and, indeed, the heavy double-barrel, with its stiff locks, was almost too much for our boyish strength and fingers. But we were at home in handling the light trout rod, or at least we fondly fancied we were, which came to very much the same thing. The prospect of a long spring holiday spent on the banks of some stream in the woodlands, was enough to set our heart beating for a week before, in throbs of blissful anticipation. In those days, we were by no means partial to solitude; but we had quite enough of the fisherman's instinct to be content with a single trusty comrade. Nor as yet had we attempted the refinements of fly-fishing. A short, somewhat stiff rod was our equipment, roughly though strongly spliced where it had been broken in previous adventures. The eve of the eventful day was devoted to researches after bait; to digging up of corpulent worms and brandlings; to investigations beneath cucumber-frames, where snakes might lie spawning; to excavations in asparagus beds and richly-manured borders. In the early morning we were up and away, scorning the idea of any regular breakfast. Yet were we far from being so indifferent to creature comforts as to neglect the commissariat. The basket, far heavier than it was likely to be later, was well-packed with substantial bread and meat and the pastry we had wheedled out of friends in the kitchen. Of course, our hopes hung in a measure on the weather. A settled downpour might damp our ardour and send us home sooner than otherwise. But supposing it to be a promising morning, the spirits rose in proportion. The birds were singing or chirping from every bush and tree, busy in their nest-building or the subsequent domestic arrangements. Thrushes and blackbirds went tripping across the dewy lawns; as the wood pigeons were cooing from the coppices and the rooks above our heads cawing in the elms. In other circumstances we should have been delayed or diverted by a hundred objects of passing interest. But now we were out upon urgent business; and no stockjobber hurrying to keep an appointment with a syndicate, could more thoroughly realize the value of time. And distance lent enchantment to our hopes; for we were not going to fish in the familiar home-brook, where we had a long-standing acquaintance with each shoal of minnows, but in a famous fishing stream in the adjacent parish. So we brushed the dew from the long grass in the meadows; sought short cuts through the hedges, charging the

weak places at a hand-gallop, and tore our way through the matted covers, scaring rabbits and pheasants from among our feet in the undergrowth. Repeatedly, ere the river was reached, we had to pause and recover breath before starting again; and, once on the brink, not a moment was to be lost, and the rise of a tiny trout, breaking the surface in a succession of rings, set our fingers all a-trembling as we precipitately set up the rod. We are bound to add that enthusiasm would cool down when we signally failed in our well-meant efforts. Though we had sat at the feet of loafing underkeepers and poachers, and had paid far more attention to their instructions than to our studies, we had hardly as yet made satisfactory progress. At any rate we fear we had not the root of the matter in us; nor is perseverance a boyish virtue. To be a successful angler, you should throw your whole soul into each cast, and concentrate the mind on each movement of the line, as if the sudden rise were matter of certainty. How can a light-hearted boy do anything of the kind, when a trial has persuaded him that 'the fish are not moving,' and when his attention is being distracted by a variety of delights. The water-rat will go plunging beneath the shelving bank; the weazel will dart swiftly across his path; the thickets on the banks are sure to be alive with birds, for all birds love to have their haunts within reach of running water; the squirrels are scrambling up the trunks of the trees, peering out with glittering eyes from behind the boughs; you come perhaps upon a merry colony of sand martins, shooting out and in from the face of the sand-bank under the gnarled roots; possibly even the kingfisher flashes by like a gleam from a rainbow, with his blues and purples glancing in the sunlight. There is no sticking to the rod with such temptations. Down it is dropped in a pool beneath the alders, the hooks having been previously baited to salve the conscience; and you have broken away into the thickets on a bird-nesting raid. On you are led, from surprise to surprise, and from pleasure to pleasure. You intrude upon the domestic felicity of couple after couple, that, shrieking or twittering from the adjacent sprays, watch your doings in impotent indignation. There is the common barnlike abode of thrush or blackbird, straw-thatched and mud-plastered; the coquettish *cottage ornée* of the chaffinch, with its silvery intertwining of lichens and feathers; or the sequestered residence of the retiring little wren, seemingly planned rather according to the ambition of the architects than their necessities.

Or, by way of variety, the attention may be attracted by the rushing of the cushat dove's strong pinions over head, as she foolishly gives the alarm by flying away from her nest among the fir-branches. Then up you go, climbing hand-over-hand, setting your feet on the easy steps of the sylvan staircase, in the shape of drooping boughs at regular intervals: and from beneath you can see the glitter of the two white eggs, through the open lacery of the twigs they are resting upon. After a time, a bout of nesting of this kind satiates the cupidity of the most grasping of treasure-seekers; but then, in course, come lunching and bathing, a little more fishing; another dip in a peculiarly inviting-looking pool; a fresh impulse to the fishing from hauling ashore a monster of a quarter of a pound or so; and finally a delicious slumber somewhere in the shade, which sends you in a refreshing pilgrimage through the wonders of dreamland, and has carried you on by the time you are awake again, into the deepening shadows of the evening. It is true that the contents of the basket which hurt the shoulder in the morning, may be weighed by ounces when it is emptied at night; all the same, that outing is a white-lettered day, indelibly engraved on the youthful memory.

And, allowing for the changes in our tastes as we grow older, that we maintain to be the true spirit in which the fisherman should take the field. His pursuit we hold to be but a means to his end, which is enjoyment. It is not given to every man to be an accomplished artist with the brush or the pencil, any more than with the rod; to dash off the venerable mill among the alder bushes, with its lichen-covered wheel, to catch the old church tower to his satisfaction, with the lights and shadows of the embowering foliage: still less to transfer to his block the golden glories of the sunset. Nor can many people find a sustained interest in archæology, reading ancient histories in crumbling stones, prostrating themselves before half-obliterated brasses, or grubbing about in the dimness of crypts and vaults. Even when fairly well primed as to the past of battlefields and feudal fortresses, the charm of historical associations may soon pall upon one. But we believe that, as Washington Irving has remarked in one of the delightful essays in his 'Sketch Book,' most Englishmen have an undeveloped admiration for Nature, while almost all have secret hankerings after sport. So we believe that same early initiation into fishing to be a valuable part of a liberal education. It not only keeps the

ardent youth out of mischief, besides bringing into play his skill, judgment, and self-reliance; but in after-life, by bringing the man into intimate relation with all that is most picturesque and beautiful, it is at least as beneficial to the mind as to the body.

Any article on fishing would be impossible without a reference to Izaak Walton. In fact, the good old man has said as much for the sport in its milder forms as can be said, and as we return to his pages—of course, in one of the old illustrated editions—we can never wonder at his perennial popularity. The essential freshness of the tone is enough to assure immortality to any book. In his quaint and godly talk he gives expression to the simple poetry that inspires the feelings of many an unlettered brother of the craft. Even when he wrote in prose, he was really as much of a poet as many of the melodious masters of the lyre he quotes with honest admiration. And his own simple verses, coming straight from the heart, are often singularly touching. Take, for instance, and almost at haphazard, his profession of his angling faith.

'I care not, I, to fish in seas,
Fresh rivers best my mind do please,
Whose sweet calm course I contemplate,
And seek in life to imitate.'

His mind reflected with a sober, quaker-line colouring all the pictures of rural beauty and felicity about him. We have had many books since then by such devoted lovers of English scenery as Gilpin and Howitt, and Borrow and Jennings. But we know none that breathes so entirely the essence of tranquil enjoyment, or so ardently expresses the happy faculty of finding recreation in trifles. Unreal it may be, in its idealization of manners in the immediate neighbourhood of the Court and capital; for the golden age had gone over before the days of Walton, and we imagine that Maudlin, the pretty milk-maid and her mother, may have been scarcely so unsophisticated as they appeared. But the worthy old angler saw everything as he wished to see it; and certainly life then went comparatively placidly, even within hearing of the bells of Bow.

Regarding him from the point of view of the practical fisherman, there can be no question that Walton was too scientific. He darkens knowledge with words in his interminable directions for baits and lures. The skilled fisherman in Scotch or Norwegian waters is content with a very limited selection of flies, modifying their sizes according to the state of the water and the different

streams in which he casts. But Walton, a cockney by birth and habits, though by no means in sentiment, was the patriarch and antetype of a class which has been very unfairly condemned. It is only the ignorant and the prejudiced who profess to look down upon cockney anglers. No doubt it is a somewhat ludicrous spectacle to see a corpulent City man out for the day, hung up in an armchair in a commodious punt, on a couple of 'rypecks,' somewhere between Staines Bridge and Teddington Lock. He bobs his hooks over a bit of bottom carefully prepared by ground bait, and hauls in the bleak or gudgeon that attach themselves. And he stimulates surfeited nature between times with the miscellaneous contents of baskets and bottles. But with your genuine cockney angler on the other hand, the intellect must be in the ascendant over the flesh. Even should he get leave for a day in protected water, the fish are wary, as the stream is still. When he makes a mistake there is no *locus pœnitentiæ*; the fish are scared, and take refuge in their retreats. Much may be forgiven to the fisherman in a highland river, where the water is coming down in a porter-coloured flood, and breaking over the boulders and the pebbles. But the cockney must know all the times and the seasons; he must have studied the particular species of fly which happens to be about at that moment, he must mount his tiny hooks on the most delicate tackle; and master his victims by his dexterous versatility. Above all, he must have learned to drop his fly like thistledown, on the very spot where experience or instinct has told him that a big trout is likely to be on the feed. And as he must avoid making the faintest splash on the surface, he often pitches the hook with extreme adroitness against a convenient root or stone, so that it shall settle silently down on the water in the *ricochet*. Then the listless and overfed alderman of the pool sails up silently, and languidly lays hold, to be roused to abnormal activity by the prick of the barb when he is struck. His spasmodic energy must be humoured, for the gut, though tough, is slight. Then comes the delicate play of the wrist, as the trout makes for the roots, where the line may be entangled. It is a case of most diplomatic give and take, while the will of the superior being is imposed upon the fish; and barring the chance of a determined display of pigheadedness, the odds are that the leviathan is brought to bank, when the successful fisherman may be proud of the achievement.

So we say that no man has a right to sneer at cockneys; but

it is difficult to decide where the line is to be drawn, between cockneys and the rest of the angling brotherhood. We suppose that the man must be called a cockney who takes an occasional day for trout, on the lower waters of the Thames, or on a preserved stretch of the Wandle. Though there are bits of the Wandle as romantic as anything much farther afield; where the river steals along silently on its gravelly bed under groves that in the season are sonorous with nightingales. But the Colne, and the Darent, and the Itchin, and many another stream of the kind in the home counties, are to all intents and purposes as suburban as the Wandle, now that London has been enveloped in a network of railways, though it was very different in old Walton's days, when Venator went to hunt for otters near Tottenham. And the fishing in the wilder west or north of England is anything but cockney, in any sense of the term. What can be more striking than the scenery along the streams of Devon or of Derbyshire; still more in Wales and on the Northumbrian border? The worst is, that these streams are either strictly preserved or infamously poached; or else they are poisoned by the overflow from flourishing industrial establishments or chemical works. But if any rambling Piscator had *carte blanche* from the proprietors in any particular district, he would find some of the English counties, in early summer, an angling paradise. As it is, Mr. Piscator can do a good deal for himself, by being informed as to inns which have certain fishing privileges—all the more if he can supplement that by introductions to local landlords. As Thackeray said in his 'Snob Papers,' an agreeable man from town is sure to be made much of in remote localities; and you can hardly please a provincial magnate more than by courteously suing for some favour which costs him nothing. But it is always good to illustrate the general principles one lays down, by particular instances. In northern Northumberland, for example, the angler can hardly go far wrong if he establish his headquarters, say, at Alnwick or Wooler, making flying trips to the unpretending hostleries dotted about among the sheepwalks of the Border. The fisherman anticipates the summer or autumn tourist, so that he can find comfortable accommodation where bedrooms are scarce; and yet the patronage of the tourist has prepared the way for him. And Northumbria, in every sense, is classic ground. You throw your flies in the water that ran red with blood in many a fight and daring foray: the memorials of the past are all around you,

in the shape of ballad-renowned scenery and famous fortresses. There is Warkworth hanging over the Coquet, and Alnwick looking down upon the Aln: and Ford by the Till with its grey battlements among its mediæval shrubberies, where Lady Heron held King James in that fatal flirtation. There is what was once the 'brown ridge' of Flodden, though now reclaimed by the farmer and planter: there on the horizon, and conspicuous from each height you climb, is the mass of Bamborough, looming on the eastern horizon, 'King Ida's Castle, gaunt and grim'; and, as you are casting for sea-trout in the estuaries of the coast, there stretches before you all the sea-scenery of Marmion, as described in the nuns' voyage from Holy Isle to Tynemouth. And, though it is going somewhat out of our beat to speak of scenes on the Scottish side, there is the Border keep of Hermitage in Liddesdale, associated with the brigand Lord Foulis and the fiery Bothwell; there is the gaunt, square tower of Mangerton, the seat of the rough and hard-riding Armstrongs; and then there are the summits of those Eildon Hills that were cleft in three by the incantations of the same mighty wizard who 'bridled the Tweed with its bridge of stone!' Turn your steps as you will, if you know anything of folklore or fishing lays, the appropriate ballads will be ringing in your ears, from those that commemorate the glories of Chevy Chase in Otterburn, to those others by the modern Northumbrian anglers that sing the speckled trout of Redesdale or Coquetdale. The towns where you take up your quarters are quaint, like Alnwick, when you enter the main street under battlemented gateways, and may stumble in any of the back lanes on ruins of mediæval bits of architecture. You pass the deep and rapid streams by high and narrow bridges of a single arch, that could be defended more easily than the fords, when the bale-fires proclaimed one of the warden raids. You come upon the lonely peel tower, with the rusty iron gratings that have survived the inner doors of iron-clenched oak, to which the villagers used to retreat with their movables and their cattle; and you may still trace the lines of their outer fortifications, which protected the common cornland against what was simply a flying foray.

We know few more enchanting amphitheatres than that where the Coquet circles round the headland of Warkworth Castle, beneath the wooded precipice where the hermit had his cave. Throwing a long line from the more open southern bank, you cast the flies into the most tempting swirls and ripples, and the trout

of the romantic Coquet are as game in fight as in flavour. But for a really representative northern river, perhaps none is superior to the Aln, which winds for many a mile through the wild Home Park, surrounding the present ducal residence of the Percies. There is a concentration of characteristic Northumbrian scenery and associations, with excellent fishing to boot—that is to say, if you happen upon the river when it is in order. Setting your face to ascend it, you may be supposed to make your start from beneath the Castle, which with its battlements manned by the stone figures of feudal men-at-arms looks down over grassy slopes to the broad sweep of the stream. Passing the bridge, you are beneath banks covered with shrubberies, with gravel walks that rather resemble carriage-drives, kept in the most exquisite order. There the Aln washes the ruined walls of the Abbey, which was sheltered under the fleshly arm of the warlike Percies as well as by its own sanctity; and a little higher up, when in flood, it comes brawling over its bed of rock, under hanging woods that sadly puzzle the novice in casting. The trout are strong and active, as they always are in such broken water; nor is it always easy, pulling, with a steady pull, against the stream, to land them without assistance from among the snags and rocks that are their habitual haunts. The noble trees are gradually dwarfed in the less kindly soil, and the thick covers break away into scattered patches of copsewood, which in their turn give place to furze-thickets, as the sheepwalks are lost in the moors.

As the river contracts, the trout grow smaller; but the little fellows are quite as lively as the larger, though you must be content to let greater numbers console you for lack of weight. The air is more exhilarating as the scenery becomes wilder. In place of wood-pigeons and pheasants flying out from among the ivy-covered trees; instead of the thrushes and blackbirds which love the thickets by the water, you have linnets singing among the fragrant blossoms of the furze; water-wagtails and water-rails jerking from stone to stone in the open stream, while plovers and the wary curlew are piping and whistling upon the moors. And very similar is the general character of these Upper Northumbrian streams, which feed the Tweed through its numerous tributaries. A day among them will seldom repay a man who cares chiefly for size. Sometimes the most skilful fly-fisher will be disheartened, even in circumstances that seem otherwise favourable. But if you condescend to stoop to worm, and if you have enough of the boy in you to love a break-neck or sprain-ankle scramble, we know no fishing that is more enjoyable or has more thoroughly the mountain flavour.

You are seldom shut up in 'shaggy glens,' as in the Scotch Highlands; but the sense of utter loneliness is made all the more impressive by the limitless landscapes of billowy moor that stretch around you to the horizon. Except occasionally for an outlying sheep-farm or shepherd's shanty, you never come upon a human habitation; and unless from the grouse on the wing, the only sounds that reach your ears are the bleating of the sheep from a thousand hills, and perhaps the distant bark of a sheep-dog. The bogs and moorland seem flat to the eye, though the country is really extremely hilly; but the stream up which you are casting with a very short line as you climb, has worn its way down the ever-deepening bed of a ravine. Here it flows gently through a little patch of land-locked meadows, enamelled with flowers and patched with bog-grass; there it loses itself in an almost impervious tangle of marsh-alder; and again it comes tumbling over the face of a rock in a series of tiny cascades, with rough landing-stages at intervals. The trout may be unsophisticated, but they seem to be singularly wide-awake. Should you come upon them down stream they will shoot away out of sight simultaneously; nor is there the faintest chance of a bite, where your person or even your line has cast a shadow. The only chance is to stalk them, making approaches stealthily from the side, and very often crawling on hands and knees. We need hardly say that the exercise is severe, when you have to handle the rod 'with skill and dexterity,' in all manner of singular attitudes; and the efforts appear to be somewhat disproportioned to the end, when you are perpetually risking an accident for a four-ouncer. But the appetite, in the way of excitement, comes with indulgence, just as in salmon-fishing the actual value of the prize is a secondary consideration, and as when the first flight of hard-riding gentlemen are risking their necks for a fox.

We spoke of the chance of accident, and even a slight accident might be serious. The unlucky fisherman, crippled by a sprain, might lie indefinitely awaiting the arrival of some Good Samaritan in the shape of a passing shepherd. A very powerful piece of drama might be wrought up out of the victim of angling enthusiasm, with growing pains and failing strength, tortured by mental anxiety, thirst, and starvation: meditating over the follies of a misspent life; and listening to the death dirge croaked by the ravens which hopped around him, whetting their beaks for the banquet. Then, of course, would come the climax of a great deliverance, when the victim, who had swooned in agonies of super-exaltation, should be saved by some collie, à la the 'Barry' of

Mount St. Bernard, and carried home to a shepherd's cottage to be nursed by some wild-flower of the wastes.

Even without conjuring up anything so sentimentally romantic, we may say from our own personal experience, that these moorland fishing expeditions may end awkwardly enough. To our mind, the most serious take-off to the pleasures of fox-hunting is the fact that the very best run of the season may probably land you far from home; and few things are more dismal than the ride back in the dark, when you are piloting yourself by devious lanes through an unknown country, on the horse you have ridden almost to a stand still. But what is that to groping your way on foot, through trackless morasses to some lonely village inn on the Borders? Excitement has carried you too far afield, when the lengthening shadows warned you to put up your rod. The first part of the walk is pleasant enough, over sound, springy moss; and if you know little of the points of the compass, you are guided by the course of the stream. But the shades of night have been falling fast, till the lowering heavens seem to blend themselves with the barren moors. The ground about you becomes rushy and boggy; and you have a disagreeable recollection of the 'moss-pits' and 'spring-heads' which you walked past thoughtlessly in the afternoon. You must go wide of the stream for the best of reasons; you might as well try your powers at dancing on the tight-rope as at threading the rocky sheep-paths that follow the ravine. You feel more and more weary as discouragement grows upon you; you detest the innocent victims that weight the creel on your shoulder; and then, unless Providence interpose to guide you out of your difficulties, perhaps you had better decide for a fireless and foodless bivouac. Hitherto—as we are happy to say—Providence *has* always helped us in similar circumstances; but more than once we have only found a way out of our difficulties when despondency had almost passed into despair.

It is a natural transition from what used to be the wild debatable lands of the Border, so fiercely disputed between Englishman and Scot, to the still wilder and grander Highlands. Nothing, of course, can be more magnificent in point of scenery; and the rivers and lakes are *fischreich* enough in all conscience, as the Germans say. But the changes in the Highlands, within living memory, are sad enough, so far as some men little more than middle-aged are concerned. When we were young, there were great districts where you might fish very much where you pleased, free from any interference from the keepers. To be sure, we had to make up our mind to a certain amount of hardship; but what

was that when the spirit was buoyant and we had the *dura ilia* and the constitution of a Highland poacher? We were content to live on bannocks and trout, washed down with milk corrected by spirits; and we could always shirk the fleas in a Highland bed by making our couch on fresh-pulled heather or in a hayloft. Then we could wander whither fancy might steer, or, striking anywhere down into the nearest valley, were sure to find water abounding in trout, with possibly, the chance of a grilse or a salmon.

Nowadays, all is altered. Railways run in all directions, and coaches or tourist-vans, in regular connection with the coaches, penetrate the remotest valleys. The ancient 'change-house,' where whiskey was sold to stray tramps and travellers, is gone, and has been replaced by the Gothic hotel with its innumerable chimneys and gables. Each Highland proprietor, sitting at his own receipt of custom, is eager to make a profit of everything within his bounds. When fishing is worth anything it is never free; and keepers and watchers are always on the look-out for the trespasser who has crossed his neighbour's 'march.' There used to be lakes almost virgin of the artificial fly, and the only difficulty was to find a craft to go afloat in. If it was anyway practicable, and if you did take the trouble of transporting a boat across country on a pair of cart-wheels, you made miraculous hauls, hand over hand, occasionally landing some monster from the depths that might have been gorging or fattening there from time immemorial. Now, you have the advantage of housing yourself in costly hotels, with the drawback of having to scramble for fishing-grounds and boatmen. You must abdicate all free-will—which is fatal to the enjoyment of the genuine angling vagabond.

Say you have set your heart upon trying your luck in Loch Awe, or in one of those Sutherlandshire lakes which more recently have come into fashion. You communicate with the landlord a fortnight before, that you may be assured of a boat and a bedroom. Thenceforward, till the engagement comes off, you feel yourself in slavish bondage. You turn up at the inn punctually as per engagement; the weather, for a wonder, is all that could be desired, and the lake looks as inviting as ever. The eye of imagination peoples it with speckled trout, full of life and play, while you see sullen *salmones feroces* hanging over the bottom, almost as big as ground-sharks and quite as voracious. The landlord is civil to a 'kent' customer, and a capable boatman throws a finger to his cap, and intimates that you have been lucky enough to secure his services. So far, all seems promising, and after dinner you adjourn contentedly

to the smoking-room. But there clouds of something besides tobacco-smoke settle down on your serenity. Without being unreasonably jealous, over-competition in the circumstances is abominable; and the group of guests who have drawn round the fire are one and all enthusiasts of the angle. Whether they tell the truth about their recent catches is a matter between themselves and their consciences, though the runs draw out and the fish swell portentously with each successive tumbler of toddy. You know too well what it all means. The next morning you are up and out of doors betimes—very much earlier than there is actual occasion for; and you love your pillow as well as another man. You step into a boat ballasted by a luncheon hamper, and should be soothed by the song of the larks and the melodious ripple of the wavelets. A gentle breeze is blowing from the west, and the clouds are eclipsing the inconvenient sunshine. The men lay themselves leisurely down to their oars as they pull round the headland for your favourite bay, and there, on the very spot on which you have set your affections, another boat is already in possession; while in the gentleman in tweeds with the fly-garnished head-piece you distinguish one of the long-bow men of the night before.

In fact, fishing from any fashionable headquarters has become a perpetual scramble, exciting all the baser passions of our nature; although in one way it should recommend itself to experts of the craft, since the fish are becoming yearly more difficult to allure. How can it be otherwise when the waters are being perpetually lashed and trolled by performers many of whom are inconceivably clumsy; when from early morning to dewy eve the fishing-grounds are being continually plashed through and paddled over. To take one of the smaller lakes, though not the least famous. We well remember when Loch Leven was almost a sanctuary; at least, there were only a couple of boats upon it; one of them belonging to the 'tacksman' of the fishings, the other to the proprietor. Many a noble day's sport we have had in the latter; starting leisurely of a spring morning from the good town of Kinross, where Roland Graeme had his memorable outing when he met Henry Seyton in disguise at the fair. Dropping the anchor off the Castle Island, or off that other one consecrated to his saintship of St. Serf, it was either our own fault or the fault of the weather if we did not fill magnificent baskets. Now, the loch is always navigated by industrious fishing fleets, and is the meeting place for half the fishing clubs in Scotland; and although the competitors may be masters of all the refinements of the craft, it

seems to us that they weigh the contents of the baskets more commonly by the ounce than the pound.

The best hope of being happy nowadays in the Highlands is to put up in private quarters; and it is a matter to be managed easily enough by any trout-fisher with a reasonable circle of acquaintance. With salmon-fishing it is different. But beautiful trout are going a-begging in the spring, in many a lakelet and stream, in June more especially. The southern lessee never shows in the north much before the middle of August, and you can give him the pleasure of conferring a favour which practically costs him nothing. Should he be civil enough to make an offer of his shooting lodge, even though he should couple it with a tender of the key of the cellar, it will probably be wise to decline. The lodge is left in charge of a housekeeper, or more likely of the keeper's wife, and in either case their notions of cookery are of the rudest. But the landlady of the nearest inn is delighted to do all in her power for a friend of the shooting proprietor; tourists being scarce as yet, she concentrates her attention on you; and should you have to drive any distance to your work, there is always a 'conveyance' to be hired. And to our mind, notwithstanding the wet—and it is perpetually dripping on the western coasts—there is hardly a more delightful month in the Highlands than June. Vegetation everywhere is of the brightest and the freshest, from the tender shoots of the reviving heather to the brilliant green of the firs and the bursting leaves on the white-stemmed birches. The air is laden with invigorating fragrance, and the birds seem to sing more and more vociferously in each of the freshening showers. The rain may soak you, but it never hurts. And, talking of invigoration in association with water, how delightful is the morning header in the limpid pool, for though for the moment it suspends the beating of the heart, subsequently it sets all the blood a-boiling.

The 'conveyance' you had chartered drops you at the mouth of some lonely glen, and thenceforward, for the rest of the day, your communications are cut off from the world. Instinctively you tread lightly on the velvety turf and the heather roots, as you softly make approaches to the points whence you are to cast over the broken water. And, independently altogether of the fish you may rise, you have your reward in observation of animated nature. The grey fishing-suit blends its tints with the rocks and the trees, and the keen-eyed *feræ naturæ* are unaccustomed to human intrusion. We are far from saying that you may see the variety you

might have seen some thirty years ago. The keepers in the preserves have been only too busy exterminating what they are pleased to proscribe as vermin; fancy prices have been set upon the eggs of eagles and ospreys and peregrine-falcons. Yet still, in the wilds and wastes of Ross-shire and Sutherland you may gaze at the golden eagle circling overhead, or the peregrine stooping from her eyrie among the cliffs over the mountain lake, on the crippled grouse. The wild cat and the martin-cat have well-nigh disappeared: yet not very long ago we have listened to the wailing cry of the former as we walked homewards in the gloaming under a huge natural cairn, where in days of yore the cats had a populous colony; while the otter, an epicure and daintily destructive, feeding on the choice morsels from the shoulder of trout or grilse, still has his haunts under the gnarled fir-roots. The badger may be heard snorting and rooting like a pig in the dusk; and as for the half-domesticated red deer in the strictly guarded deer-forests, the spring fisherman is always scaring them from their drinking-places and lairs. The hooded crow, of course, keeps a watchful eye upon the visitor, in case he should leave anything eatable on his trail; and in the rocky recesses of the glen is the inevitable pair of ravens, with their ill-omened croak, so suggestive of shattered limbs. You may catch few fish or many, according to circumstances, for fishing everywhere is proverbially uncertain; and the wind may suddenly shift, or the atmosphere may become surcharged with electricity; though, with a simple selection of suitable flies, you can hardly fail to do something satisfactory. But whether you catch little or much, a day of this kind is almost equally delightful; and what an appetite you bring back for your modest dinner, and how soothing is the subsequent pipe, with the snow-white sheets in prospect.

We have talked chiefly of trout-fishing as being within reach of all, and as good an object for a country excursion as any other. But no one who has had fair experience of both, can dream of comparing trout-fishing to salmon-fishing. As Mr. Colquhoun observes, in his 'Moor and Loch,' all great salmon-fishers have been accomplished trouters; but once they have graduated in the grander sport, it is a case of *nulla vestigia retrorsum*, unless it be a question of necessity rather than will. With salmon, there is at least as much science required, while there is infinitely more excitement. We do not talk of salmon-fishing from a boat, where the novice gives himself over blindly to the guidance of the boatman, who is presumed to be familiar with all the pools; when the casting tackle is intertwined of triple gut, and nothing short

of a shark could break away in the open water, when the hook has gone firmly home. We speak of salmon-fishing from the bank or by wading in one of the rapid and comparatively narrow Highland rivers, where each faculty of the angler must be kept on the stretch, and he must have fair physical endurance into the bargain. Well do we remember the stream where we rose and killed our first salmon. It was a typical stream of this kind. It flows in Ross-shire through enchanting scenery, for the climate there is singularly mild for those latitudes. A beautiful river to sketch, it is a somewhat ugly river to fish. Full three-fourths of the most famous pools are practically inaccessible to the unskilful hand, and the *virtuoso* who has fallen upon gout and evil days had far better shift his quarters to the southward. It comes swirling down through a succession of rocky pools, forming so many resting-places for the fresh-run fish between 'leaps' which are more or less formidable. The banks are bare where, so far as fishing is concerned, they might as well be wooded; but wherever there is a specially fascinating nook, there firs and birches feather down upon the water, with but an insignificant strip of margin between. To do much, you must have learned to cast the line underhand, or the expenditure of hooks upon the foliage will be intolerable. We set out to fish that stream one dull June day, when a protracted drought had half-dried all the rivers in the country. In nearly three weeks the most renowned anglers had been baffled, nor had a man of them succeeded in 'stirring a fin.' Needless to say, we were by no means sanguine, though the natural buoyancy of youth corrected the despondency of the keeper. Donald, who was ordinarily keen enough, did not conceal his conviction that we 'might as well have stoppit at the lodge for a' the good we would do.' So, leaning in unstudied attitudes on the gaff, and refreshing himself with huge pinches of snuff, he rather cynically 'superintended.' Now, we have remarked already that one of the first conditions of successful fishing is perseverance, and that earnest attention ought never to be relaxed, so long as you choose to persist in the face of disappointment. We began well, casting and working the flies with thoughtful earnestness within the limits of our skill, and were willing enough to be guided by Donald's sagacity. But after a while it was not in the temperament of our time of life to continue to work conscientiously under circumstances so discouraging. For there was Donald croaking behind; while before us, the ordinary high-water mark on the

rocks showed how hopelessly the river had dwindled. We took to casting carelessly with eyes all abroad, when of a sudden a shock thrilled up to the shoulder, and round the rod, that had sprung back after being bent nearly double, the broken line had twined itself in a series of snakelike sinuosities. It did not need the portentous malediction of Donald—perhaps it was just as well that it was in the most guttural of Gaelic—to recall us to a sense of the enormity. It seemed we had struck a twelve or fifteen-pounder so fast that he had been literally hoisted half out of the water, when the strong casting line snapped and he carried off gut and hook as a *souvenir*. Then, as the novelists say, came a passion of shame and remorse; nor could there be a question as to the sincerity of our penitence. We had missed the chance of the week, and what more could be said!

As it happened, however, it pleased Providence to soften the sharp lesson. Shortly afterwards came a delusively exciting episode. We laid hold of something under the water, and, judging from the struggles, it seemed to be a fairly-sized grilse. So we plied our invisible friend *secundum artem*, and finally brought him safely into the shallows, when, to our disappointment, he was nothing more than a pound-and-a-half trout, that the barb had caught by the gistle of the tail. Being still in the throes of penitence, 'served us right' was our verdict, and possibly it was a reward for praiseworthy resignation that the chapter of sensational incidents was only coming to its climax. After a great deal of throwing blank, we descended on the 'Ladies' Pool,' so-called because it was not only one of the most picturesque, but one of the most fishable. The river, after a rapid descent, swept in comparative calm, though with strongly suppressed excitement, through something like a natural tank it had excavated in the cliffs. Above was one rush, below was another; and the fish that had flung themselves up the lower falls were pretty sure to rest for a day or two before going further. Doubtless there were delightful lurking-places among the stones in the silvery bottom, which, alas! could be dimly distinguished through the too-transparent water. In more favourable circumstances, the casting there must have been almost a certainty. As it was, warned perhaps by a presentiment, we had changed the gut and knotted on a new fly, and sure enough, half a minute afterwards, came a rush, with a breaking of the surface into little whirlpools, and the hook was drawn swiftly down with a growing strain on the line. It was a 'fish'—this time

there could be no doubt of that; but for long we saw nothing of him. He sulked, and could scarcely be woke up to an effort by the judicious chucking in of pebbles. Donald at last lost all patience, declaring that, at this rate, we might tarry on the bank till the next speat should bring the water down with it. He was clear that we must try more active treatment and proceeded to pitch in a heavy stone. The sluggish salmon was moved at last, and thenceforth we had no reason to complain of his inactivity. Up he came with a plunge, describing an eccentric series of somersaults; happily he was hooked hard and fast, or he must have broken away half-a-dozen times. Then off he went on the run for the fall, and had he fairly gone over, it would have been all up with us. 'Giving him the butt,' by instinct rather than science, he turned to the timely strain, when a fresh fancy seized him, and in he came with a confiding rush under the bank, as if he meant to fawn on our fishing-boots like a spaniel. Before we had half hauled in the bagging line, he spared us the rest of the work by bolting away again; and in fact he fought so desperately that he soon wore out the strength he might have saved. Donald, who was dancing along the bank like a baboon on a hot plate, kept issuing instructions we did our best to follow, and the fish was being perpetually turned head-on to the stream, with the water running in at his gills and asphyxiating him. It boots not to tell how repeatedly our heart was in our mouth, as he was floated sideways and brought apparently senseless below the bank, to revive at contact with the rough stones, and vanish from the flash of the gaff. At last the deadly cleek was driven into the shoulder, and the silver scales of a handsome short-bodied ten-pounder were glittering on the grass and the heather shoots. We have seen many a salmon landed since then, but never with similar feelings of ecstasy, and so intense was our satisfaction that it added little to the triumph to have succeeded where so many masters had failed. We had sense enough to know that it was very much luck, and latterly fortune was literally depending almost on a hair. The gut had been grazed against the stones, and the hook had very nearly worked itself out of the jaw, and was holding to a strip of skin on the edge of a widening hole. We have seen many a salmon landed since then; yet we are just as fond as ever of trouting, since it leads us on expeditions among those English scenes which, after all, are the most enchanting in the world to an Englishman.

MY ARAB.

My Arab, though in a very prosaic way an object of interest, is by no means a morally grand or physically picturesque personage. A child, not of the everlasting desert, but of the ebbing and flowing gutter, and literally, as well as figuratively, a child. He speaks of himself as 'going on ten,' and, as a guess, that is probably tolerably near the mark, though his mother professes to be uncertain whether it is ten or eleven years of age that he will be 'next hopping.' The hopping is her chief chronological landmark. She generally speaks of things as having occurred during or so long before or after the hopping, though occasionally she will fix a date by reference to the year in which 'we—that is to say, her husband, self, and child—'wintered in the house'; the house in this case meaning the workhouse. The boy is popularly known as 'Slinger,' a cognomen about the origin of which, as about his age, there is a degree of uncertainty. Some say it was bestowed upon him in consequence of his skill with the simple and easily made sling which serves boys of his class instead of the more elaborate and costly catapult with which better-off boys do their window-breaking and attempt bird-slaughter. Others assert that the sobriquet is a tribute to his skill and dexterity in 'slinging his hook,' a phrase which, being interpreted, means getting out of the way if he individually, or the body of 'small gangers' of which he is a leading spirit, have 'been up to games.' And certain it is that Slinger displays a marked aptitude for 'getting round the corner' or doubling about the network of slums in which his home (?) is situated, if he has been 'up' to anything which makes it desirable that he should keep himself dark.

His features are pinched, but tolerably regular; his expression of countenance 'old-fashioned' and cunning; his complexion is naturally sallow, though in any case it would appear so, owing to the fact that it is habitually 'grim'd' with dirt. His hair is dark and curly, and worn uncombed and matted, and he has a pair of bright, black, beady eyes which are constantly 'on the move.' He is small and thin, but wiry, and active and hardy, and would probably look a fairly well-made boy could his figure

be made out. With him, however, all outline of form is 'lost' from his always being clad in cast-off garments 'a world too wide,' and as regards trouser-leg and coat-sleeve a world too long, though the latter inconvenience is easily remedied by the rolling-up process. Winter and summer alike he goes barefoot, and to a certain extent from choice. He could no doubt muster up old boots as he musters up other old clothing. As a matter of fact, he does occasionally get hold of a pair that have still some wear in them, and as far as appearance goes would be rather a credit than otherwise to the rest of his costume, but instead of wearing them he disposes of them in the way of sale or barter.

Stockings are undreamed of in his philosophy of dress. New clothing of any kind, but particularly new boots, he takes it as a matter of course are not for him, and as a wearer of old clothes he is decidedly of opinion that there is—in what he would call an 'over-the-left' sense—nothing like leather, nothing so bad, so great a mistake, as old boots. His objection to them is the practical, not to say painful one, that they, as he puts it, 'raws yer feet.' Not from their being too large—though the fact of their 'fitting too much' has a tendency to rawing—but because the ridges worn in them never suit the 'bend of the foot' of second wearers, the hillocks coming where the hollows ought to be, and then, as Slinger remarks, 'there yer are, yer know, with the top of yer foot half rubbed off.' If Slinger is to be taken as an authority—and I believe he may be, while others have confirmed to me his testimony upon the point—this fault in old boots extends even to 'new second-handers,' as those boots are styled that have been mended and done up, or, in technical language, 'translated' for the second-hand wardrobe trade. The 'lasting' which they receive in the translating process may make them look unwrinkled, but when taken into wear the 'real original' old ridges soon assert themselves again. It is commonly supposed that translated boots are chiefly sold among the poorest of the poor, but this is a mistaken notion. The principal market for them is among the struggling poor, the poor who strive to conceal their poverty, who have, or believe they have, an appearance to keep up, who cannot afford—if they can possibly avoid it—to be seen down at heel, and who would lose caste and be utterly ashamed were they compelled to be seen without boots at all. This, however, is by the way. Slinger elects to go barefoot, and gives a reason for the faith that is in him upon the point. Nor does he

appear to suffer much from the practice, the more especially as from wear and weather the soles—and for the matter of that the ‘uppers’ too—of his feet have hardened till they are almost like horn.

Slinger is no half-breed of his race. His parents before him were gutter-bred. They have *not* seen better days, have not come down in the world, are not, any more than the bulk of their neighbours, what they are owing to any sudden or unexpected turn in

The April sky of chance,
Or the strong tide of circumstance.

Pretty much as Slinger is now was his father at the same age. On attaining to man's estate it seemed good to him to give himself brevet rank as a labourer, though in reality he is, merely and sheerly, a loafer. According to a convenient fiction current among the loafing fraternity, he is always engaged, from early morn to dewy eve, searching for work and never finding it. Practically his being's end and aim, both by day and night, is to obtain as much drink as possible ‘on the cheap,’ and one way or another he manages to obtain a good deal. Though belonging to the no-visible-means-of-support, rather than to the habitual-criminal class, he is ‘well known to the police.’ He has repeatedly ‘done time’ for ‘drunks and disorderlies,’ and for assaults upon the police, public-house landlords and barmen, and members of the general public who may have been guilty of resenting his importunities to them to stand treat. He has also been several times convicted under the Education Acts, and might have been convicted many a time and oft for wife-beating could the wife have been induced to charge him, but she takes her beatings much as a matter of course, and won't charge. Mrs. Slinger—so to name her for the nonce—is chiefly instrumental in keeping together what serves the family for home. In the winter she works—when she can get work to do—in white-lead factories, or pickle factories, or in rag-sorting sheds or fire-wood yards. In the season the family go hopping, and occasionally fruit-gathering and harvesting also. On these agricultural expeditions the mother and boy do the work, while the father constitutes himself contractor for and ganger over their labour, and sees to obtaining for himself his accustomed share (which is the lion's) of their earnings. The town residence of the family consists of a small back room containing, by way of furniture, an old and never-

washed 'tick' stuffed with straw or shavings, which serves as a bed, and a bundle of equally unwashed rags for bed-clothes, and a couple of chairs so shorn of their fair proportions of spars, and generally so battered and broken as to be unsaleable even among the furniture brokers of a rookery quarter. If the room they occupy for the time being has a 'sideboard' cupboard, they use the top of it as a table. If not, they can get along very well without a table. Both husband and wife prefer malt liquors to such slops—as they consider them—as tea or coffee, and beer-cans serve them sufficiently for such culinary operations as they indulge in.

As regards eatables, they live chiefly upon bread. If they want other food, and chance to be in a position to afford it, they get it ready-cooked, in the shape of the mysterious but cheap and savoury sausage or saveloy, or the toothsome trotter. Even if they want a bit of something warm, they are still independent of home cookery. They can obtain hot 'faggots,' hot baked potatoes, hot fried fish, or a cut of pork with hot pease-pudding. The latter, however, is a dish to be thought of only in association with high festival occasions, as, for instance, when the money brought back from the hopping is being 'knocked down.' By people of the Slinger genus—and a great many hop-pickers are of that genus—such money is very speedily knocked down, and that in ways that would earn the sternest disapproval of thrift societies. But when it is considered how hard they live, and often how hard they starve, in a general way, it is scarcely matter for wonder, though it may be for regret, that when opportunities serve they should go upon the principle of living like lords—according to their notions of lordly living—for a day or two in the year. The paucity of domestic means and appliances in the Slinger household has, like many other evils, a touch of compensatory good about it. Though the family revolve in a limited orbit, they are frequently changing their place of abode, and when making a move they have commonly good reasons for wishing to

Fold their tent, like the Arabs,
And silently steal away.

This it is easy for them to do. They have simply to shake the straw out of the 'tick,' roll it and the bed-clothes into a bundle which the wife can as easily carry under her arm as can the husband the two cut-down chairs, and—there they are. Mrs.

Slinger, like her husband, is given to drink, and in respect to her son there is a good deal of literal truth in the grim joke which speaks of gutter children as being 'weaned on gin and winkles.' In regard to drink, she goes upon different lines from her husband. For weeks, and sometimes for months at a stretch, she will confine herself to her sober two or three pots of malt or 'goes' of spirits per diem. Then she has a break-out, and drinks hard and continually until she is pulled up by an attack of delirium tremens, or, as she and her neighbours style it, a 'fit of the shakes.'

Slinger is free of his parents' home—after a fashion. If there is food about and to spare—which is not often the case—he can have of what is to spare, and it is always open to him to 'kennel' in the parental room by night, if he feels so disposed. In a general way, however, he is expected to 'scratch for himself,' and this expectation, unlike the supposition as to his father's looking for work, is no fiction, but a stern reality. He must scratch, or starve. The senior Slingers are better known than trusted. There are shades of respectability and social and commercial standing even in rookery circles. There are families to whom rookery tradespeople will give credit, and families to whom they will not, and the Slinger family is severely relegated to the latter category. As a consequence, when the mother is out of work or 'on the drink,' the household would often be totally without food, or the means of procuring it, were it not for the broken victuals or odd coppers brought home by young Slinger. He quite appreciates his importance in this connection, and on that and other grounds assumes a very independent tone in relation to his parents. Whether such a child owes obedience to such parents is a question of morals which need not be discussed here. However that may be, he yields them very little obedience, and no reverence, though he will stand by them or stick up for them in a clannish, blood-is-thicker-than-water spirit. Thus, if he found his father engaged in fight with another loafer, he would—his sense of fair-play being imperfectly developed—harass the enemy's rear. He would attack any boy, slang any woman, and 'eave arf a brick at' any man whom he found 'molesting' his mother when she was disguised in liquor. At the same time he will himself unreservedly speak of 'our old feller' or 'our old hen'—as he familiarly calls his parents—having been 'properly tight,' and will gleefully narrate and consumedly laugh over any strange pranks they may have played when in their cups.

'Shan't' is the word most familiar in his mouth as a reply to any parental command that does not exactly chime in with his personal feelings or plans. 'Dry up!' is the slangy and impatient exclamation with which he cuts short the occasional attempts of his mother to lecture him. If his father threatens—as when drunk he frequently does—to 'quilt' him, or skin him alive, or the like, he will, if he is out of arm's reach, and a retreat secure, retort with—'Will yer, old feller? oh no yer won't, though. Yer ain't a going to knock me about for nothink, so I tells yer.' Sometimes the father, by going upon the principle of a word and a blow, and the blow first, manages to seize and thrash the boy. At such times Slinger is heard to mutter of a good time coming, when he will be able—and willing—to punch the expletive 'old 'ed' of his progenitor. For, sad to say, the vernacular of my Arab is not only larded with slang, but full of strange oaths and dreadful imprecations. Happily, however, his cursing is mere 'poll-parroting.' He knows not what he says; is incapable of realising the horror excited in the minds of others at hearing such words falling from the lips of one so young.

As a scratcher, Slinger naturally turns his attention in the first place to the matter of food; and here he is fortunate enough to have some specially happy hunting-ground. In the immediate neighbourhood of the rookery, within the limits of which the Slingers confine their peregrinations, there is an engineering establishment, employing some five or six hundred 'hands.' Opposite the workshop gates are several coffee-shops and eating-houses of the humbler kind, to which numbers of the hands who do not go home to breakfast or dinner resort for those meals. Such hands are a tolerably hungry army, and, in an ordinary way, make a clean sweep of their provender. Still, there are generally a few among them who, from one reason or another, are 'off their feed' for the passing day, and unable to make a square meal. As in eating-houses of the type here in question both prices and quantities are fixed, any portion of his food that a customer may not be able to eat becomes his by right of purchase. The more thoughtful and kindly among the hands (and they are the great majority) exercise this right. If at the conclusion of a meal they have still a 'remainder' on hand, they bring it out with them, and bestow it on some one of the half-dozen young Arabs who are 'in the know' as to these eating-houses, and have marked them for their own. Of this little band my Arab is chief, partly

by right of prescription as having been longer on this 'lay' than any of the others, and partly also, and in a greater measure, from having 'fought his way to glory'—for among his tribe right is awarded but scant acknowledgment unless it is coupled with might. There are few days upon which he works this lay that Slinger does not come in for sufficient food to save him from hunger. Most days he receives enough for a 'good rough fill,' and occasionally the scraps fall to his lot so plentifully that he is, of his abundance, able to take some home.

In other ways these workshops are a material source of income to Slinger. The failure of appetite upon the part of some of those who are most liberal in the bestowal of scraps upon him at breakfast time arises from their having had 'a drop too much' over night. They know from experience that towards eleven o'clock a great thirst, combined with a peculiar 'sinking,' will fall upon them, and that their first desire in life for the moment will be 'to have their lives saved' by means of a hair of the dog that has bitten them. Of course, they are not allowed to take drink into the shops, but it is possible to get it smuggled in, and Slinger is known to them as an able, willing, and successful blockade-runner. Before going in to work after breakfast, the 'Lushington' who engages Slinger's services in this line calls at a neighbouring public-house, pays for a pint—or it may be a quart—of malt liquor, and leaves orders that it is to be put into a well-corked 'bottle' can and delivered to Slinger on demand. At the appointed hour, Slinger, with his can concealed about his person—and here the circumstance of his garments being many sizes too large comes in handy—goes on watch outside a certain part of the workshop walls until he receives a signal that the coast is clear; then he clambers up, with cat-like agility, hangs on the top of the wall with one hand, passes the can with another, and drops back without having shown his head over the parapet. For each job of this kind Slinger's charge is a penny—though he sometimes gets more, that being a point he leaves to the discretion or generosity of the individuals employing him in this wise.

It is not always convenient to his clients to pay him down on the nail, and this affords him a legitimate excuse for being at the workshop gate at one o'clock on Saturday, when the men are coming out with their week's pay in their pockets. Some there are among them who do not take such heed for the morrow as in strictness they perhaps ought to do. The claims upon their wages may be fully

as many as, or even more than, the amount will meet, but they are exhilarated by having a lump sum in hand. For a moment they feel in their degree softened by prosperity, and to this feeling Slinger owes it that he frequently comes in for other odd coppers beside those lawfully (or unlawfully) due to him for blockade-running. Nor is this all. 'Now's the day and now's the hour' when workmen decide that their shop caps, or jackets, or overalls, have been worn to a point at which they are no longer worth the trouble and expense of washing and repairs. Garments that it has on this ground been determined to cast off are frequently presented to such waiters upon Providence as Slinger, and that youth being known, and in his way popular, fares very well in this respect. Some such gifts are only fit to be sold as rags; others are in such a condition that they can still be utilised for wear—by an Arab. Thus it comes that Slinger is often to be seen going about clad in engineering costume. Very much clad in it, it might be said, for he has to don the clothes subject only to such alterations as he can himself make in them, and these alterations consist merely in cutting 'lumps' off sleeves or legs, or the skirts of jackets.

If by chance the coffee-houses fail Slinger, or for any reason he has not resorted to them for a day, there are one or two tradespeople in the neighbourhood upon whom he can generally count as 'good' for a little food. Their gifts are ostensibly made in pure charity, and doubtless there is some touch of 'divine pity' in the spirit that moves the givers. Broadly, however, these donations in kind are of the nature of blackmail. Partly because ousness premises are very small, and partly because it is the trade custom, shop stock is a good deal exposed in rookery quarters. This the Slinger tribe regard as a providential arrangement on their behalf. The presence of my Arab near a shop is looked upon by the shopkeeper in much the same light as the presence of a fox in the vicinity of a hen-roost would be looked upon by a farmer. It is known that he is watching for 'chances.' He is a snatcher as well as a scratcher. In the matter of 'doing a snatch,' or, in plain English, stealing, Slinger's desire is not to leave undone, but to keep unknown. If he 'spots' a chance, if he thinks he can do a snatch safely, he will do it, with a clear conscience. With him doing a snatch is no mere euphemism, no mere slangy paraphrase of 'convey the wise do call it.' He has no sense of moral restraint or moral wrongdoing in this connection.

He has never heard that it is a sin to steal a pin, and if anyone propounded that doctrine to him his reply would probably be, 'Get out; yer ain't a going to stuff me like that.' Or he might even more emphatically and tersely answer, 'Yer lie.' Knowing his views and practice as a snatcher, the fat and scant-o'-breath old widow who keeps the small general shop, and the cripple proprietor of the fried fish and baked potato emporium, occasionally make him small gifts from the staler portions of their edible stock. These gifts are professedly charitable offerings; but the real purpose of those making them is to bribe him off, to induce him to turn his attention as a snatcher to some other establishment than theirs. His snatchings are not altogether confined to goods exposed for sale. He will snatch from women shopping, and more especially from those of them who may be so unwise as to place some of their purchases upon the pavement whilst they make others. A favourite form of raiding with Slinger is to lie in wait outside a sweetstuff shop, and snatch from children as they come out of it, absorbed in loving contemplation of the delectable wares in which they have been investing their pocket pence. Judged technically, Slinger as a snatcher is rather bold than discreet. He has repeatedly been captured, either after pursuit or red-handed in the act. More than once he has been in the hands of the police, but only in their hands. The value of the property snatched is so small that it is not worth the while of anyone to incur the trouble and loss of time that would be involved in 'charging' him. He is dealt with on the short shrift principle. Either the constable or the robbed tradesman gives him a sound shaking or cuffing, and sends him about his business.

So far as Slinger has any business, it is that of 'rusting'—*i.e.* collecting—on the chiffonnier system—old metal and disposing of it to the marine-store dealers. In his character of a 'ruster,' Slinger probably could, an' he would, account for the mysterious disappearance from 'houses to let' of their more portable and easily accessible metal fixtures. In the open pursuit of his calling he rakes about the foreshore of the river, makes expeditions to workshops and factories whose refuse is cast out of doors, and penetrates into lanes and alleys into which back gates of better class houses open, and in which consequently there is to be found a good deal of flotsam and jetsam of household wreckage. Though 'rust' is the primary object of his explorations of rubbish heaps, all is fish that comes to his net. In the 'utilisation of

waste substances' field of labour he is in his degree an all-round hand. Bottles, jam pots, preserved provision tins, old boots, rags and bones—his capacious rusting sack hath stomach for them all. Occasionally, too, if he comes across a locality, as he sometimes does, in which there are a few good wasteful servants, he will devote a special field-day to the collection of coals and cinders. These he can sell to the neighbours of his parents, though, with a view to his own personal comfort, he generally gives them up for home consumption. But while rusting is considered his special line, he by no means confines himself exclusively to it. He will hire himself out as extra bawler and general assistant to 'barrer' greengrocers, fish-hawkers, hearth-stone vendors, and the like. He is always ready to hold a horse, or open the door of a cab; and from time to time he tries his luck at the railway stations as one of the 'carry yer parcel' brigade. When the local soup-kitchen is open he provides himself with a beer-can, and spends a good part of his mornings hanging about the gates of that earthly paradise. He begs drops from the fortunate ticket-holders as they come out, and when successful in his appeals, drinks up each drop as it is given, so that his can is ever empty and stands as a mute witness in justification of his horse-leech cry of Give! give! He sticks to his post to the end, in the hope that each morning may prove one of those red-letter ones on which, there being a surplus of soup after the ticket-holders have been supplied, there is a free distribution on the principle of first come, first served.

During those parts of the summer in which he is in town Slinger frequently resorts to a high road much traversed by excursion vans. There he tosses, and tumbles, and grimaces, and turns cart-wheels, for the delectation of the bold beanfeasters, who encourage him by coppers, or perhaps by a delusive expectation of coppers which are not given. On the return journey, when the feasters are elated, some of the more good-natured among them will, if they have any scraps of food left in their hampers, throw them out to the Slinger kind. But occasionally some brutal ruffian, upon whom the bad drink has done its bad office, will, when the Arabs ask for bread give them a stone in the literal sense of shying a bottle at them. Once Slinger was severely gashed in this way, and more than once he has narrowly escaped getting under the wheels of the vans, so that it is quite on the cards that some day he will be butchered to make a

cockney holiday. On bank holidays, and other high festival days, Slinger considers it worth his while to make his way to some haunt of holiday-makers, where he constitutes himself a camp follower (self-attached) of the army of pleasure-seekers. Like other classes of camp-followers, he is suspected of predatory proclivities, and, as a consequence, comes in for a good few kicks; but he also gets some halfpence, and having already discovered from painful experience that life is not *all* beer and skittles, he is content to take the rough with the smooth, the kicks with the halfpence, in a philosophic spirit. As a camp-follower, he is not afraid of venturing far afield. Young as he is, he has done his Derby. He tramped to Epsom with an 'Old Aunt Sally' party, assisted them in the management of the game during the day, and camped out with them on the downs by night. He often sleeps out even when in his own district. His parents take no particular notice of his doing so, regarding it merely as a matter of taste, or of passing convenience upon his part. The practice probably inflicts very little hardship upon him, as wherever or whatever may be the places of shelter to which he resorts when out o' nights—a point your Arab always keeps to himself—they would have to be very wretched places indeed if they were not, to say the least of it, as comfortable and healthy as the parental living and sleeping apartment.

Once Slinger attempted to take a comparatively high flight in the way of business. Having by some means amassed capital to the extent of one shilling, he was in an evil moment induced to embark in the newspaper trade. Being utterly uneducated, and therefore largely dependent upon others, he was so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of a clique of trade competitors, who, partly for a 'lark,' and partly from trade-unionist motives, set him calling 'a penny Hekkers' a penny each, or two for three-a-pence, and announcing battles, murders, and sudden deaths that had not taken place. Of course, might-have-been purchasers thought that Slinger was trying to have a 'lark' with them, and he did little or no trade. In the course of a week his capital was gone, and with this loss, and the gain of a pair of beautiful black eyes received in combat with one of the youths who had played tricks upon him, he retired from the business in disgust, and betook him to rusting again.

As already indicated, Slinger is sufficiently brave in his own fashion; but it cannot be said of him that he is chivalrous where

the softer sex is concerned. It could scarcely be expected that he would be. In the home circles in which he moves, wife- (or paramour-) beating and fights between women are common occurrences, and Slinger, like his betters, unconsciously adapts himself to his environment. Even now, if he has a quarrel with a girl, his talk is of 'slogging' her, of 'knocking corners off' her, 'landing her one on the nose,' and so forth. On another point, too, his environment seems likely to mould him evilly. If there is anything in the law of hereditary transmission the 'drink craving' is in all probability inborn with Slinger, and all his surroundings tend to develop it in him. He is witness to scenes of drinking and drunkenness every day of his life, and has probably no conception that they are not an ordained and integral feature of every-day life. If, when themselves in the maudlin stage of drunkenness, his parents want to show an unwonted tenderness towards him, they give him of their drink; and when carrying drink for others he takes toll in the shape of a good sip, which evidently goes down with a relish highly suggestive of the strength of the craving growing with his growth.

My Arab, as I have said, is a tough little customer; nevertheless, his wretched mode of life tells upon him at times. He has few opportunities, and probably little inclination to practise the virtue of personal cleanliness, and neglect upon this point brings its own punishment, in the shape of frequent outbreaks of skin-disease. In the winter season, if the weather proves severe, it finds out his weak spots. His feet, though case-hardened, swell and 'chap,' and he suffers from neuralgic affections. At such times he is to be seen painfully limping about, with his face bandaged—or, as he graphically describes it, 'with his head in a sling'—and looking, and doubtless feeling, 'the picture of misery.' But the point in connection with him which affords 'food for saddest contemplation' lies in the fact that, wretched little creature though he be, he is a highly fortunate example of his class. There are hundreds, nay thousands, of children who are to the full as badly off as he in relation to parents and home, and surroundings generally, but whose sufferings are more and greater than his, because they lack his capacity for self-help. What will become of Slinger if he lives to attain to manhood is of course an open question, though within a very limited range. If very fortunate, he may get into 'trouble' while he is still young enough to be sent to an industrial school or reformatory.

If this does not befall, the open question will be narrowed to whether it will be the criminal or the no-visible-means-of-support section of society that he will go to swell. To one or the other of them he is certain to gravitate.

I have seen much prettier and more sentimental pen-and-ink pictures of Arabs than mine; and it may be that there have been individual Arabs who have justified these pleasanter portraits. Broadly speaking, however, the characteristics of my Arab are the badge of all his tribe. He is drawn from the life, and that not from a single sitting, not as the result of a morning's 'slumming' by way of pastime, or a flying visit to a low quarter under police protection. I have known Slinger from his infancy upwards, and have had a daily—and still existing—experience amongst his class, extending over a period of twelve years. I have drawn him, both personally and as a type, in his habit, as he lives, with all his imperfections on his head; but in doing so I have wrought in no unkindly or unpitying spirit.

THE GIANT'S ROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSÂ.'

Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.'—*Macbeth*.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARK ACCEPTS A DISAGREEABLE DUTY.



VINCENT had his misgivings, as he walked towards Campden Hill, that at such a period of the London season his journey would most probably be a fruitless one. But as he approached the house he found one or two carriages waiting outside, the horses troubling the hot afternoon stillness with the sharp clinking of harness as they tossed their impatient heads; and by the time he had reached the gate the

clatter of china and the sustained chorus of female voices coming through the open windows made it plain enough that Mabel was 'at home,' in a sense that was only one degree less disappointing than what he had dreaded.

He was almost inclined to turn back or pass on, for he was feeling ill and weak—the heat had brought on a slight tendency to the faintness which still reminded him occasionally of his long prostration in Ceylon, and he had a nervous disinclination just then to meet a host of strangers. The desire to see Mabel again prevailed, however, and he went in. The pretty double drawing-

room was full of people, and, as every one seemed to be talking at once, Vincent's name was merely an unimportant contribution to the general hubbub. He saw no one he knew, he was almost the only man there, and for a time found himself penned up in a corner, reduced to wait patiently until Mabel should discover him in the cool half-light which filtered through the lowered sunblinds.

He followed her graceful figure with his eyes as often as it became visible through the crowd. It was easy to see that she was happy—her smile was as frank and gay as ever. The knowledge of this should have consoled him, he had expected it to do so, and yet, to tell the truth, it was not without its bitterness. Mabel had been his ideal of women, his fair and peerless queen, and it pained him—as it has pained unsuccessful lovers before—to think that she could so contentedly accept pinchbeck for gold. It was inconsistent on his part, since he had sacrificed much for the very object of concealing from her the baseness of Mark's metal. He forgot, too, the alchemy of love.

But one cannot always be consistent, and this inconsistency of Vincent's was of that involuntary and mental kind which is not translated into action.

She saw him at last and welcomed him with an eager impulsiveness—for she knew now that she had been unjust to him at Laufingen. They talked for some minutes, until Vincent said at last, 'I hear you are going to play Beaumelle?'

'Oh yes,' said Mabel. 'Isn't it presumption? But Mrs. Featherstone (you've met her once or twice at our house, you know)—Mrs. Featherstone would not hear of my refusing. Mark, I believe, thinks the part hardly suited to me, but I mean to try and astonish him, even though I may not carry out his own idea of Beaumelle. I love Beaumelle in the book so much that I ought not to be quite a failure in the play.'

'No, you will not fail,' said Vincent, and dared not say more on that point. 'I—I should like very much to see this play,' he said, a little awkwardly. 'Could it be managed?'

'I will try,' said Mabel. 'I am sure Mrs. Featherstone will give me a card for you if she can. But I warn you, Vincent, it's not a good play. There's one strong scene in the third act, and the rest is a long succession of *tête-à-têtes*—like a Society "Punch and Judy." It will bore you.'

'I think not,' said Vincent; 'and you won't forget, will you?'

‘Of course not,’ she replied. ‘There is Mrs. Featherstone coming in now. I will ask her at once.’

But Mrs. Featherstone had an air of suppressed flurry and annoyance which was discouraging, and Gilda’s handsome face was dark and a little defiant as she followed her mother into the room.



‘Can you get away from all these people for two minutes?’ said Mrs. Featherstone, after the first greetings; ‘I’ve something to tell you.’

Mabel took her through the rooms out upon a balcony overlooking the garden and screened from the sun by a canvas awning. ‘We shall be quiet here,’ she said.

Mrs. Featherstone did not speak for some moments. At last she

said: 'Oh, my dear, I don't know how to tell you—I can't talk about it with ordinary patience yet—only think, our foolish, self-willed Gilda told us this morning that *that* Mr. Caffyn had proposed to her and she had accepted him—after all the offers she has refused—isn't it too shocking to think of? And she won't listen to a word against him; the silly child is perfectly infatuated!

'What does Mr. Featherstone say?' asked Mabel, to whom the news was scarcely a surprise.

'My dear, he knows very well it is all his fault, and that if he hadn't taken the young man up in that ridiculous way all this would never have happened—so of course he pretends not to see anything so very unsuitable about the affair—but he doesn't like it really. How can he? Gilda might have married into the peerage—and now she is going to do this! I'm almost afraid these theatricals have brought it on.'

Mabel was sincerely sorry. She was fond of Gilda, and thought her far too good for Harold. 'It may come to nothing after all,' she said, as the only form of consolation she could think of.

'If I could hope so!' sighed the distressed mother, 'but she is so headstrong. Still, he's not in a position to marry at present—unless Robert is insane enough to advance him to one. Would you speak to her? It would be so sweet of you if you only would!'

But Mabel felt obliged to decline so delicate a mission, and excused herself. Then, as they re-entered the room she mentioned Holroyd's petition. Mrs. Featherstone recollected him faintly, and was rather flattered by his anxiety to see her play; but then he was quite a nonentity, and she was determined to have as brilliant and representative an audience as possible for the performance.

'My dear,' she said, 'I would if I could, but it's quite out of the question; my list is overfull as it is, and I haven't an idea where we shall put all the people who will come; there's so much talk about it everywhere that we have had next to no refusals. But if he's only anxious to see the play, and doesn't mind not being seen at it, he could get some idea of the treatment next Friday if he cares to come to the dress rehearsal. You know we arranged to run right through it for the first time. We thought of a small impromptu dance after the rehearsal, so if Mr. Holroyd would like to come a little earlier I shall be charmed to see him.'

So Vincent was brought up to the lady, who repeated the

invitation to the rehearsal, which he accepted, as it practically gave him the opportunity he had desired.

Meanwhile Gilda had drawn Mabel aside towards one of the windows. 'Well,' she said, 'so you have been told the great news?'

Mabel admitted this, and added something as nearly approaching to congratulation as her conscience allowed.

'Ah,' said Gilda, 'you're on mamma's side.'

'I am on no side,' said Mabel, 'provided he makes you happy.'

'Which you think rather doubtful?' replied Gilda, with a jarring little laugh. 'Really, Mabel, I do think you might resign him a little more gracefully!'

'I'm afraid I don't understand you,' said Mabel, proudly.

'No?' said Gilda. 'You are very innocent, dear. I can't undertake to explain—only I am not altogether blind.'

'I hope not,' said Mabel, and left her. She was afraid that if she stayed she might be tempted to say what could do no possible good now.

Mrs. Featherstone had gone, with a gracious reminder to Vincent of his promise to come to the rehearsal. It was late in the afternoon, and every one seemed suddenly alarmed at the idea of being the last to go, the consequence being that the rooms were cleared in an astonishingly short time. Mabel stopped Vincent as he too was preparing to take his leave. 'You must stay till Mark comes back, Vincent. He has taken Dolly to the Academy, really, I believe, to get away from all this. You haven't seen Dolly since you came back, and she's staying with me for a few days. You won't go away without seeing her?'

Vincent had been disappointed at not seeing her at the Langtons' the day before, and waited willingly enough now. It would be some comfort to know that the child had not forgotten him and would be glad to see him. He had not long to wait. A hansom drove up, and the next minute Dolly came into the room with all her old impetuosity. 'I've come back, Mab,' she announced, to prevent any mistake on that head. 'We drove home all the way in a black cab with yellow wheels—didn't you see it? Oh, and in the Academy there was a little girl with a dog just like Frisk, and I saw a lot of people I knew, and——'

'Don't you see some one you used to know?' said Mabel, breaking in on her stream of reminiscences.

'Have you forgotten me, Dolly?' said Vincent, coming forward out of the shade. His voice was a little harsh from emotion.

The change in the child's face as she saw him was instantaneous and striking, all the light died out of her face, she flushed vividly, and then turned deadly pale.

'You knew Vincent wasn't dead really, Dolly?' said Mabel.

'Yes,' whispered Dolly, still shrinking from him, however.

'And is this all you have to say to me, Dolly?' said Vincent, who was cut to the heart by this reception. Nothing was the same—not even the love of this child.

Dolly had not been long in recovering from the effect of Caffyn's last act of terrorism; for a day or two she had trembled, but later, when she heard of Vincent as away in Italy, she could feel safe from his anger, and so in time forgot. Now it all revived again; he had sprung suddenly from nowhere—he was demanding what she had to say for herself—what should she do?

She clung to Mabel for protection. 'Don't *you* be cross too!' she cried. 'Promise me you won't and I'll tell you all about it. . . . you don't know. . . . Harold said you didn't. And I never meant to burn Vincent's letter. Don't let him be angry!'

Vincent was naturally completely bewildered. 'What is she talking about?' he asked helplessly.

'I can guess,' said Mabel. 'Come away with me, Dolly, and you shall tell me all about it upstairs;' and as Dolly was not unwilling to unburden herself this time, they left Vincent with Mark, who had just joined them. Mark was uncomfortable and silent for some time when they were alone, but at last he said: 'I suppose you have been told of the—the theatricals? I—I couldn't very well help it, you know. I hope you don't mind?'

'Mind!' said Vincent. 'Why should I mind? What is it to me—now? I thought that was finally settled at Laufingen.'

'I felt I must explain it, that's all,' said Mark, 'and—and I've a great deal to bear just now, Holroyd. Life isn't all roses with me, I assure you. If you could remember that now and then, you might think less hardly of me!'

'I will try,' Vincent had said, and was about to say more, when Mabel returned alone. Her eyes were brilliant with anger. Children can occasionally put the feats of the best constructed phonograph completely in the shade; everything that Caffyn had told her about that unfortunate burnt letter Dolly had just reproduced with absolute fidelity.

'I know what happened to your letter now, Vincent,' Mabel said. 'Mark, you never would see anything so very bad in the

trick Harold played Dolly about that wretched stamp—see if this doesn't alter your opinion.' And she told them the whole story, as it has been already described, except that the motives for so much chicanery were necessarily dark to her. A little comparison of dates made it clear beyond a doubt that an envelope with the Ceylon stamp had been burnt just when Vincent's letter should in the ordinary course have arrived.

'And Dolly says he told her himself it *was* your letter!' concluded Mabel.

'Ah,' said Vincent, 'not that that proves it. But I think this time he has spoken truth; only *why* has he done all this? Why suppress my letter and turn Dolly against me?'

'Malice and spite, I suppose,' said Mabel. 'He has some grudge against you, probably; but go up now, Vincent, and comfort Dolly—you'll find her in my little writing-room, quite broken-hearted at the idea that you should be angry with her.'

Vincent went up at once, and was soon able to regain Dolly's complete confidence. When he had gone, Mabel said to Mark: 'Harold has been here very often lately, dear. I tried to think better of him when I saw you wished it; but I can't go on after this—you see that yourself, don't you?'

Mark was angry himself at what he had heard. Now he knew how Harold had contrived to get rid of Dolly that afternoon in South Audley Street, it made him hot and ashamed to think that he had profited by such a device. He certainly had, from motives he did not care to analyse himself, persuaded Mabel to tolerate Caffyn as a guest, but lately even Mark could no longer pretend that his visits were not far more frequent than welcome.

Something of the old uneasiness in Caffyn's presence had begun to return, though Mark did not know why. At times before his marriage he had had moments of panic or mistrust, but he always succeeded in forgetting the incidents which had aroused them. If Caffyn suspected anything about 'Illusion' he would have spoken long before, he told himself. After the interview with Holroyd at Laufingen, he had ceased to think about the matter—he was safe now. What harm could any one's mere suspicion do him? And yet, for all that he was not sorry to free himself from further intrusions of a visitor in whose glance he sometimes surprised a subtle mockery, almost as if his friend had actually detected his secret and was cynically enjoying the humour of the

thing. It was only imagination on his own part, but it was not a pleasant fancy.

'He's an infernal scoundrel!' he said, with an indignation that was only very slightly exaggerated. 'You are right, darling, you shall not have to see any more of him.'

'But can't he be *punished*, Mark?' asked Mabel, and her eyes shone.

Mark coughed. If this affair were brought to light, some of its later stages might not appear entirely to his own credit.

'I don't quite see what he could be punished for,' he said.

'Not for stealing a letter?' she asked. 'It was no less.'

'Rather difficult to bring home to him,' he said: 'couldn't do it without a frightful amount of—of scandal and unpleasantness.'

'No,' said Mabel, thoughtfully, 'I suppose nothing can be done—and yet, poor Gilda! Do you know she is actually engaged to him? It's dreadful to think of that now. At least he shall never come here again, and mother must be told too when I send Dolly back. You will tell him, Mark, when you meet him that he must not call himself a friend of ours any longer. You will make him understand that, won't you?'

'Can't you tell him yourself at one of the rehearsals?' asked Mark.

'I would rather you told him, dear,' she said; 'and there are no rehearsals till Friday.'

'Oh,' said Mark, 'very well, darling, I will—of course I will!'

He was already beginning to feel that the interview might not be altogether agreeable.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HAROLD CAFFYN MAKES A PALPABLE HIT.



S Mabel had said, she did not meet Harold Caffyn again until both were dining at Mrs. Featherstone's on the evening of the first rehearsal to which Vincent had been favoured with an invitation. The instant he saw her he felt that some change had taken place in their relations, that the toleration he had met with since her marriage had given place to the old suspicion and dislike. It was an early and informal dinner, the guests being a few of those who were to take part in the acting later on. Mrs. Featherstone had contrived that Caffyn, notwithstanding his position as accepted suitor, should not sit next

to Gilda, and on taking his place he found Mabel on his other hand and his *fiancée* opposite. As often as he could, he tried to open a conversation with the former, but she met him coldly and shortly, and with each attempt he fell back baffled. He might have persevered but for the consciousness that Gilda's eyes were upon them, for she had been growing very exacting since the engagement had been formally declared. But just before the ladies rose he found an opportunity to say, 'Mabel—Mrs. Ashburn—am I unfortunate enough to have displeased you lately?'

'Displeased is not the right word,' she said: 'you have done far more than that.'

'And am I not to be told my offence?' he said, looking at her keenly.

'Not here,' she replied. 'You can ask my husband, if you like.'

'Really?' he said. 'You refer me to him, then? We must try and come to an understanding together, I suppose.'

'When you have heard him,' she said, 'there is one thing I shall have to say to you myself.'

'May I come and hear it later?' asked Caffyn, and Mabel gave a little sign of assent as she left the table.

'I shall send down for you when we're ready,' said Mrs. Featherstone at the door. 'Will those who have any changes to make mind coming now? It's so late, and we must get in the way of being punctual.'

One or two who were playing servants or character-parts left the table immediately: the others remained, and Harold, whose dressing would not take him long, found himself next to Mark, and rather apart from the men, at the host's end of the table.

'You're the very man I wanted to have a little talk with!' he began in an easy conversational manner. 'Your wife seems deucedly annoyed with me for some reason—she says you can explain. Now, just tell me quietly without any nonsense—what's it all about, eh?'

Now that Mark had seen the other's conduct in its true light he was really indignant: Caffyn seemed a more undesirable associate than ever. He would have been justified in taking a high standpoint from which to deal with him—since whatever his own errors had been, they would never be revealed now—but somehow, he adopted an almost conciliatory tone.

'The fact is,' he replied, with an embarrassed cough, 'it's about that letter of Holroyd's.'

Caffyn's face slightly changed.

'The devil it is!' he said. 'Thought I'd heard the last of that long ago!'

'You're likely to hear a good deal more about it, I'm afraid,' said Mark. 'It has only just come out that it was his, and unopened—you will find it awkward to contradict.'

Caffyn was silent for a time. Dolly must have spoken again. What a fool he had been to trust a child a second time!—and yet he had had no choice. 'Well,' he said at last, 'and what are *you* going to do about it?'

Mark's throat grew huskier. It was odd, for there was really no reason for being afraid of the man. 'Well, I—in short, I may as well tell you plainly, my wife thinks it is better we should not see any more of you in future.'

There was a dangerous look in Caffyn's eye which Mark did not at all like. 'Ah, well, of course you mean to talk her out of that?' he said lightly.

Was there a concealed menace in his tone? If so, Mark thought,

he probably considered that his services connected with Vincent's sudden return gave him a claim. Well, he must disabuse him of that idea at once.

'It would be of no use if I tried to talk her out of it; but, to be quite candid, I—I don't intend to do anything of the kind. . . . I know we've been friends and all that sort of thing, and till I knew this I always said what I could for you; but—but this suppressing a letter is very different. I can't feel the same myself for you after that, it is better to tell you so distinctly. And then—there is poor little Dolly—she is my sister now—it seems you have been frightening her a second time.'

'On whose account—eh, Ashburn?' asked Caffyn.

Mark had expected this. 'I'm sorry to say on mine,' he replied; 'but if I had known, do you suppose that for one moment—I don't deny that, as I told you at the time, I was glad to see Holroyd leave town just then; but it was—was not so important as all that! Still you did me a service, and I'm sorry to have to do this, but I can't help myself. You will find others harder on you than I am!'

'Does that mean that Mrs. Langton has been told this precious story with all the latest improvements?' asked Caffyn.

'Not yet,' said Mark, 'but she must know before long.'

'And as for yourself, you consider me such an utterly irreclaimable blackguard that you can't afford to be seen with me any longer?' pursued Caffyn.

'My dear fellow,' protested Mark, 'I don't want to judge you. But, as far as the conclusion goes, I'm afraid it comes to that!'

'Perhaps it has not quite come to that yet,' said Caffyn, as he drew his chair closer to Mark's, and, resting one arm on the back, looked him full in the face with searching intensity. 'Are you sure you have the right to be so very exclusive?'

If Mark could have controlled his nerves then, he might have been able to parry a thrust which, had he only known it, was something of an experiment. As it was, the unexpectedness of it took him off his guard, just when he thought he was proof against all surprises. The ghastly change in him told Caffyn that he had struck the right chord after all, and a diabolical joy lit his eyes as he leaned forward and touched his arm affectionately.

'You infernal hypocrite!' he said very softly. 'I know all about it. Do you hear?'

'About *what*?' gasped the miserable man, and then with

a flickering effort at defiance, 'What do you mean?' he asked, 'tell me, what are you hinting at?'

'Keep quiet,' said Caffyn, 'don't excite yourself: they'll notice something presently if you look like that! Here are some fellows coming round with the coffee, wait till they have gone, and I'll tell you.'

Mark had to wait while one man brought him his cup with the milk and sugar, and another followed with the coffee. His hands shook and upset the cream as he tried to take up a lump of sugar.

'I wouldn't take milk if I were you,' advised Caffyn. 'Try a *liqueur* brandy'—a recommendation to which Mark paid no attention.

It seemed an eternity till the men had gone; all the time Mark tried to believe this was one of the old dreams which had not visited him for so long, or, if he was really awake, that Caffyn must have got hold of something else—not *that*; he had had false alarms like this before, and nothing had come of them.

Caffyn seemed to have forgotten their recent conversation as he deliberately sipped his coffee and took a cigarette; he offered Mark one and it was declined. 'What do you suspect me of having done?' demanded Mark. 'Oh, my dear fellow, I don't suspect you,' replied Caffyn; 'I know. You can't play the moralist with me, you high-minded old paragon!' He spoke with a kind of savage jocularity. 'I tell you I know that you got your fame and fortune, and even that charming Mabel of yours, by a meaner trick than I, who don't pretend to be particular, should care to dirty my hands with. I may have helped a child to burn a letter—I don't remember that I ever stole a book. I've been an ass in my time, I dare say, but not quite such an ass as to go about in a lion's skin!' Mark sat there dumb and terror-stricken. His buried secret had risen after all—it was all over. He could only say in his despair—

'Has Holroyd told you?'

Caffyn knew all he wanted when he heard that. 'We won't go into that,' he said. 'It's quite enough for you that I do know. Do you feel quite such a virtuous horror of continuing my acquaintance now? Couldn't you bring yourself to overlook my little shortcomings this time? *Must* you really close your respectable door on me?'

Mark only looked at him.

'You fool,' said Caffyn, 'to give yourself airs with me. I've

done you more than one good turn. I believe I rather liked you—you did the thing so well that I'm hanged if I should have had the heart to show you up. And now you *will* go and make an enemy of me—is it quite prudent ?'

'What do you want me to do?' asked Mark, with his hand shielding his eyes from the shaded candles near him.

'Now you're getting sensible!' said Caffyn. 'We shall hit it off yet! You've got some authority over your wife, I suppose? Use it. Stop this cackle about the letter: make her shut her mouth; I can't afford to lose the *entrée* to two houses like your father-in-law's and your own, just now. I can be discreet too—it shall be mouth for mouth. If you don't—if you stand by and let your wife and her mother go about spreading this story until I daren't show my face anywhere, why, I shall take care to come to grief in good company! Mabel can smash me if you like to let her, but if you do, by — it shall bring my sting out! Is it a bargain?'

Mark hesitated. As they sat there he heard the sounds outside of arriving carriages and entering footsteps; people were coming in for this rehearsal. How he loathed the thought of it now! How was he to go through it?

'We shall have to go presently,' said Caffyn. 'I am waiting for my answer—yes or no?'

'No,' said Mark. 'I see no use in playing mouse to your cat. Do you think I don't know that it would come out sooner or later—if not from you, from *him*? As to forcing my wife to receive you as a friend, I'm not quite rascal enough for that yet. Do whatever you please!'

It was despair more than anything that drove him to defiance, for his knowledge of Mabel showed him that the bargain proposed, apart from its rascality, was an impossible one.

'Well,' said Caffyn, with a shrug, 'you leave me no choice, so in the course of a day or two, my friend, look out for squally weather! Whether I sink or swim myself, I shall see *you* go to the bottom!'

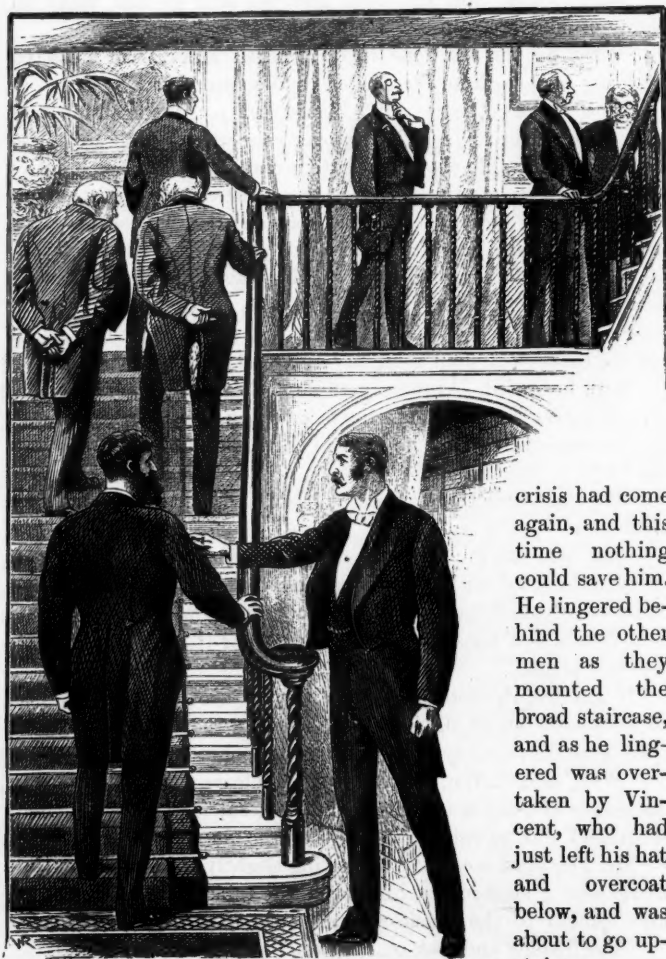
Mr. Featherstone, who was getting slightly tired of the enthusiastic young amateurs at his end of the table, here suggested an adjournment to the music-room.

'You'll come and look on, sir, won't you?' said his son.

But the merchant shook his head.

'I think I can hold on till the night itself, Bertie, my boy!' with a cleverly fielded yawn. 'I hear all about it from your mother. You'll find me in the billiard-room if you want me, you know!'

Mark rose from the table to which he had sat down with so light a heart. Black disgrace was before him, the Laufingen



crisis had come again, and this time nothing could save him. He lingered behind the other men as they mounted the broad staircase, and as he lingered was overtaken by Vincent, who had just left his hat and overcoat below, and was about to go upstairs.

'Stop!' cried Mark. 'Don't go up yet, I want to speak to you. Come in here!' and he almost forced him into the library, which was empty, and where a lamp was burning.

'So we're on a level after all, are we?' he said savagely, as he shut the door.

Holroyd simply asked him what he meant.

'You know!' said Mark. 'All that generosity at Laufingen was a sham, was it—a blind? It didn't suit you that I should give myself up of my own free will, and so soon, so you put me off my guard! And now'—his voice was thick with passion as he spoke—'now you have set that villain, that d—d Caffyn, on me! Chivalrous, that, isn't it? I've fallen into good hands between you!'

Vincent was hardly less angry. 'You think every one is like yourself!' he said. 'If it is any comfort to you to believe that I can break my word and betray those who trusted it, believe it—it's not worth my while to set you right!'

No one who saw his face could doubt that he, at least, was no traitor; and Mark felt lower than ever as he realised his mistake.

'Forgive me!' he stammered. 'I see, I ought to have known better. I hardly know what I am saying or doing just now—but Caffyn has found out everything, and—and who could have told him?'

'If any one betrayed you, it must have been yourself!' said Vincent. 'Look here, Ashburn, don't give it up like this—keep your head, man! He can't really *know* this, it must be all guess-work. Did he mention my name?'

'Yes,' said Mark.

'Well, I must have it out with him, then. What does it matter what he says if we both contradict him? I think I shall be able to manage him; only, for Heaven's sake, keep cool, leave everything to me, try to be your usual self. Where is this rehearsal going on? Let us go there at once—you'll be wanted!'

Mark said no more just then; he led the way to the music-room, and then went himself to the part which was screened off as a green-room.

The music-room was a long high gallery, at one end of which the stage had been set up. There was a small audience of a dozen or so, who were mostly related to the performers, and admitted only because it had not been found practicable to keep them out. The rehearsal had just begun as Vincent entered.

It was much like most rehearsals, and would hardly lose its tediousness in description. There were constant interruptions and repetitions, and most of the characters wore the air of people who had been induced to play a game they thought silly, but who were resolved to maintain their self-respect as long as possible; this

appearance might be due to an artistic reserve of force in some cases, in others to nervousness, in nearly all to a limited knowledge of the lines they had to deliver, and all these causes would certainly be removed 'on the night,' because the actors said so themselves. Still, on that particular evening, they prevented the play from being seen to the best advantage.

It was not a good play, and as a dramatisation of 'Illusion' was worse than the most sanguine of Mrs. Featherstone's acquaintances could have foreseen; and yet, as Vincent stood and looked on from the background, he felt strangely stirred when Mabel was on the stage. She, at least, had too intense a sympathy with her part to be able to walk through it, even at a rehearsal, though it would have been absurd to exert her full powers under the circumstances.

But there were moments in the later scenes (which even Mrs. Featherstone had not been able to deprive of all power or pathos) when Mabel was carried away by the emotion she had to represent, and the anguish in her face and low ringing tones went to Vincent's heart, as he thought how soon it might become a terrible reality.

He could scarcely bear to see her there simulating a sorrow which was nothing to that which might be coming upon her, and from which all his devotion might not save her this time. He was impatient to meet Caffyn and find out what he knew, and how he might be silenced; but Caffyn was on the stage continually, in his capacity of stage manager, and Vincent was forced to wait until his opportunity should present itself.

It was a relief to him when the rehearsal, after dragging on through three long acts, came to a premature close, owing to the lateness of the hour and a decided preference on the part of the younger members of the company for the dancing which had been promised later as a bribe, and which they had no intention of sacrificing to a fourth act—for art must not be too long with amateurs.

The room was being cleared accordingly, when Vincent saw his hostess coming with Caffyn in his direction, and heard her say, 'Well, I *will* ask Mr. Holroyd, then, if you wish it!' She seemed excited and annoyed, and he thought Caffyn's face bore an odd expression of triumph. He waited for the question with a heavy anticipation.

'Mr. Caffyn tells me you're quite an authority,' began Mrs. Featherstone (she had not yet found herself able to mention him as 'Harold'). 'You heard our little discussion about the close of that third act, just now? Now do tell me, how did it strike *you*?'

This appeal was an unexpected relief to him ; he protested that he was not qualified to express any opinion.

'Now really,' said Caffyn, 'that won't quite do ; we know how interested you are in the book.'

'We are so grateful for the least little hint,' simpered Mrs. Featherstone, 'and it is so useful to know how a scene strikes just the ordinary observer, you know ; so if you did notice anything, don't, *please*, be afraid to mention it !'

Vincent had told himself that in going there he would be able to put away all personal association with the play ; he had given the book up once and for all, he only desired to see Mabel once as his lost heroine. But nature had proved too strong for him after all : the feebleness of this dramatic version had vexed his instincts as creator more than he was willing to believe, and when in this very closing scene the strongest situation in the book had been ruined by the long and highly unnecessary tirade which had been assigned to the hero, Vincent's philosophy had been severely shaken.

And so at this, some impulse, too strong for all other considerations, possessed him to do what he could to remove that particular blemish at least—it was not wise, but it was absolutely disinterested.

He suggested that a shorter and simpler sentence at the critical moment might prove more effective than a long set speech.

Mrs. Featherstone smiled an annoyed little smile. 'You don't quite understand the point,' she said ; 'there was no question about the *text*—I had no idea of altering that : we were merely in doubt as to the various positions at the fall of the curtain !'

'I'm afraid I have no suggestions to make, then,' said Vincent, not without some inward heat.

'Oh, but,' put in Caffyn, and his lip curled with malicious enjoyment, 'give us an idea of the short simple sentence you would substitute—it's easy enough to make a general criticism of that sort.'

'Yes indeed,' said Mrs. Featherstone. 'That is only fair, Mr. Holroyd !'

If he had been cooler he might have resisted what was obviously a challenge from the enemy, but just then he had lost some of his usual self-control. 'Something of this kind,' he said, and gave the line he had originally written.

'Now that is very funny,' said Mrs. Featherstone, icily. 'Really. Why, do you know, my dear Mr. Holroyd, that the speech you find

such fault with happens to be just *the* one I took entire from the book itself!' And it was in fact one of Mark's improvements.

Vincent then saw for the first time that Mabel had joined the group, and he was angry with himself for his folly.

'Where has Ashburn got to? We *must* tell him that!' cried Caffyn. 'That distinguished man has been keeping out of the way all the evening. There he is over there in the corner!' and he gave him a sign that he was wanted. No one had seen Mark for some little time, and he had interfered very little during the rehearsal. Now as he came towards them he looked shaken and ill.

'My dear fellow,' said Caffyn, 'this presumptuous man here has been suggesting that your immortal dialogue wants cutting badly. Crush him!'

'He has every right to his opinion,' said Mark, with an effort.

'Ah,' said Caffyn with a keen appreciation of the situation, 'but just explain your views to him, Holroyd. He *may* think there's something in them!'

'It is a pity,' said Mabel, 'that Mark's book should have been without the advantage of Mr. Holroyd's assistance so long!'

She was the more angry with Vincent because she felt that he was right.

'I don't think I quite deserved that,' said Vincent, sadly. 'If my opinion had not been asked I should not have ventured to criticise; and, now I know that I have the book against me, of course I have nothing more to say. *You* seem to have misunderstood me a little,' he added, looking straight at Caffyn. 'If you can give me a minute I could easily explain all I meant.'

Caffyn understood. 'In private, I suppose?' he suggested softly, as he drew Vincent a little aside. 'I thought as much,' said Caffyn, as the other assented; 'they're going to dance here. Come up on the stage: it's clear now, and the rag's down.'

He led the way up the wooden steps by the proscenium, pushed aside the gold-and-crimson hangings, and they were in comparative darkness and absolute privacy immediately.

'Now,' began Vincent, 'you had some object in saying what you did down there. What was it?'

Caffyn had seated himself on the edge of a table which had been rolled into a corner with some other stage furniture. He smiled with much sweetness as he replied, 'I say, you know, we'd better come to the point—I know all about it!'

Only the pressing need of discovering the full extent of the other's information kept Vincent from some outburst.

'What do you know?' he demanded.

'Well,' said Caffyn, 'I know that you are the real pig, so to speak, and that miserable humbug Ashburn's only the squeak.'

'You mean you think you know that—what is your authority?'

'Now,' protested Caffyn, in a tone of injury, '*do* you think I should venture on a bold statement like that without anything to back my opinion?'

'And if Ashburn and I both deny your bold statement—what becomes of it?'

'Ashburn has not denied it, and if he did I could put my hand on some written evidence which would go a long way to settle the question.'

'I should like to see your evidence,' said Vincent.

'I was sure you would,' said Caffyn, 'but I don't happen to have it here; in fact, the papers which contain it are in the charge of a very dear friend of mine, who chanced to discover them.'

Vincent did not believe him.

'Perhaps you can describe them?' he asked quickly.

'Aha!' said Caffyn, 'I've made you sit up, as they say across the water. Oh, I'll give you every information. Those papers are of interest to the collector of literary curiosities as being beyond a doubt the original rough draft of that remarkable work "*Illusion*," then better known as—let me see, was it "*Glow-worms*"? no—something like it, "*Glamour!*" They were found in your late rooms, and one needn't be an expert to recognise that peculiar fist of yours. Are you satisfied?'

Vincent had not expected this, having fancied that his loose papers had all been destroyed, as he had certainly intended them to be on leaving England. He was silent for some seconds, then he said: 'You must get those papers for me: they are mine.'

'But, my dear fellow,' argued Caffyn, 'what earthly use can they be to *you*?'

'What business is that of yours?' retorted Vincent. 'I want them—I mean to have them.'

'You won't do any good by taking that tone with *me*, you know. Just listen to reason: if you produce these papers yourself, you'll only be laughed at for your pains. You must let some one else manage the business for you. You can't smash Ashburn alone—you can't indeed!'

'And who told you,' said Vincent, 'that I want to smash Ashburn?'

'For Heaven's sake don't *you* turn hypocrite!' drawled Caffyn. 'You can speak out now—if you've got anything inside you but sawdust, of *course* you want to smash Ashburn! I saw your game long ago.'

'Did you?' said Vincent, who began to have the greatest difficulty in keeping his temper. 'And what was my game?'

'Why,' explained Caffyn, 'you knew well enough that if you set up a claim like that on your mere word, you wouldn't find many to believe you, and you didn't feel up to such a fight as you would have before you; so you've very prudently been lying low till you could get Master Mark off his guard, or till something turned up to help you. Now's your time. *I'll* help you!'

'Then, once more, get me those papers,' said Vincent.

'To think,' observed Caffyn with pity, 'that the man who could write "*Illusion*" should be so dense. Don't I tell you you must keep in the background? You leave it all to me. There's a literary fellow I know who's on lots of journals that like nothing better than taking up cases like yours, when they're satisfied there's something in them. I can manage all that for you, and in a few days look out for an article that will do Ashburn's business for him. You needn't be afraid of his fighting—he'll never have the nerve to bring a libel action! But you can't work this yourself; in your hands all that evidence is waste paper—it's the date and manner of its discovery which must be proved to make it of any value—and that's where *I* come in. I need scarcely tell you perhaps that I don't propose to mix myself up in all this, unless there is some better understanding between us in the future.'

'You had better be quite plain,' said Vincent. 'What is your proposal?'

'There has been a little unpleasantness about a letter which little Dolly Langton and I accidentally——'

'I know the facts, thank you,' interrupted Vincent.

'That makes it easier,' continued the other, unabashed, 'though you've probably been told the highly-coloured version.'

'I've been told that you bullied that poor child into burning a letter of mine which you hadn't the courage to suppress for yourself,' said Vincent.

'Ah, that *is* the highly-coloured version,' said Caffyn, 'but for the purposes of the present case we'll assume it to be correct,

if you like. Well, we can't possibly work together if you won't make up your mind to let bygones be bygones: you understand?'

'I think I do,' said Vincent. 'Provided I forget that a letter of mine was intercepted and destroyed, unread, by a cowardly, cold-blooded trick, which if it was not actually a felony came very near it—provided I forget all that and treat you as an intimate friend of mine, I shall have your support?'

'Coarsely put,' said Caffyn, 'but you seem to have got hold of the main point.'

'And if I decline,' said Vincent, 'what then?'

'Why then,' returned Caffyn, placidly, 'I'm afraid that my friend in whose custody the papers are, and who really is as casual a person as I ever met, may mislay those documents or go off somewhere without leaving his address—which would make things awkward.'

Vincent could stand no more; the anger he had suppressed for some time broke out at last.

'If you dare to make me an offer like that in any other place than a friend's house, if you even try to speak to me when we next meet, you will be unpleasantly surprised at your reception! Do you think any help you could give me would be worth the disgrace of having you for a friend? If I am asked my opinion of you, I shall give it, and it will not be one you would care to quote. As for the papers, tell your friend (you will not have to go very far to find him)—tell him he may do what he pleases with them, mislay them, suppress them, burn them, if he likes—perhaps he will be doing me a greater service than he imagines!'

He was afraid that he might have betrayed his real feelings in the matter; but Caffyn was too much a man of the world to believe him: he only thought that the other either had independent means of proving his claim when he chose, or felt convinced that it would be proved for him without the necessity of committing himself to any alliance or compromise. He could not help admiring such strategy even while it disappointed him.

'You're devilish deep, after all,' he said slowly: 'a little overdone that last bit, perhaps, but no matter—I can read between the lines. And now, as I am due for this first dance, and they seem to be striking up down there, I'll ask you to excuse me. One word—if you want me to play your little game, don't interfere with mine—you know what I mean!'

Vincent made no answer, and Caffyn went down to the music-room again, where about a dozen couples were already dancing. It was a small and quite informal affair, but one or two people had come on from other houses, and the room was filled, without the hopeless crush which it would have contained on an ordinary occasion.

He avoided Gilda, whose eyes, however, were following him watchfully, and made his way to where Mabel was sitting looking on at the dancing; for she had declined to take a more active part, and was intending to make her escape as soon as Mark should come to rescue her.

'I'll try one more chance,' he thought, 'and if that fails——'

Vincent had satisfied himself as he passed through the room after Caffyn had left him that Mark was not there. He went through a net work of rooms, and out on the staircase, looking for him. Mark had had much to endure in the way of enthusiastic comments on his own work, and the delight he was supposed to feel at his wife's rendering of his heroine, while Mrs. Featherstone had driven him almost frantic by her persistent appeals, confidences, and suggestions with regard to the performance. He had chosen a moment when her attention was distracted to slip out unobserved. He knew he must return soon, but his nerves would bear no more just then, and wandering aimlessly from room to room, he came to one in which some light refreshments had been placed for those engaged in the rehearsal, and he filled a small tumbler of champagne from a half-empty bottle he found there and drank it, hoping it would give him courage to go back and play his part to the end. As he put down the glass Vincent came in.

'I was looking for you,' the latter began hurriedly, when he had satisfied himself that they were not likely to be overheard. 'I have seen Caffyn!'

'Well?' said Mark, listlessly.

'It is worse than I thought,' was the answer: 'he has got hold of some papers—Heaven knows how, but he can prove his case. He half threatened to destroy them, but if I know him he won't: he will use them to keep his hold over you—we must get the start of him!'

'Yes,' agreed Mark, 'I can disappoint him there, at all events. I'll go to Fladgate to-morrow, and tell him everything—it's all I can do now, and the sooner it is over the better!'

'You must do nothing without me!' said Vincent.

Despair made Mark obstinate. 'I wish to God I had spoken out last Easter! You stopped me then—you shall not stop me this time! I'll keep that book no longer, whatever the consequences may be.'

'Listen to me,' said Vincent. 'I will take back the book—I see no other course now; but I claim the right to tell the story myself, and in my own way. You will not be madman enough to contradict me?'

Mark laughed bitterly. 'If you can tell that story so as to make it look any better, or any worse, than it is, I won't contradict you,' he said: 'that is a safe promise!'

'Remember it, then,' said Vincent. 'I will tell you more when I have thought things out a little. In the meantime, the less we see of that scoundrel the better. Can't you take Mabel home now?'

'Yes,' said Mark, 'we will go home, and—and you will come to-morrow?'

'To-morrow,' said Vincent. 'Tell her nothing till you have seen me!'

They were returning to the music-room when Mrs. Featherstone passed.

'Have you seen Mr. Caffyn?' she asked Mark. 'I want to talk to him about the alterations in the fourth act.'

'He went to sit out one of the dances with Mabel, Gilda said, but I sent her to look for them, and she hasn't come back yet. I think they must have gone through the Gold Room, and out on the balcony—it's cooler there!'

When she had passed on out of hearing, Mark turned to Vincent. 'Did you hear that?' he said. 'Mabel is out there . . . with *him*—we are saved the trouble of telling her anything now . . . that devil means to tell her himself! I can't stay here!'

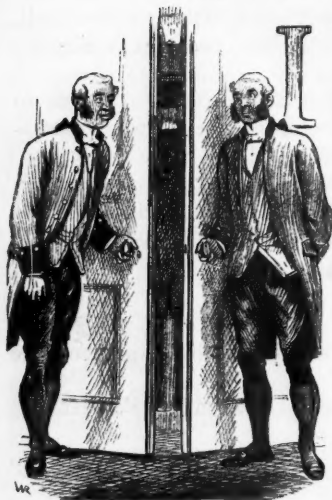
'Tell me where you are going—for God's sake don't do anything rash!' cried Vincent. 'You may be wrong!' He caught him by the arm as he spoke.

'Let me go!' said Mark, wrenching himself free.

Vincent would have accompanied him, but the excitement had turned him suddenly faint and dizzy, and he found himself obliged to remain where he was, until the attack passed and left him able to move and think once more.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAFFYN SPRINGS HIS MINE.



SHOULD like your opinion about those hangings in the Gold-Room,' Caffyn had said to Mabel, for the benefit of any bystanders, as soon as he reached her chair: 'they seem to me the very thing for the boudoir scene in the third act. You promised to help me; would it bore you very much to come now?'

Tired as she was, Mabel made no demur. She knew, of course, that he wished to speak to her alone, and she had something to say to him herself, which could not be said too soon. He led her through the room in question—a luxurious little nest, at an angle of the house, entered

by separate doors from the music-room and the head of the principal staircase; but he did not think it necessary to waste any time upon the hangings, and they passed out through one of the two windows upon the balcony, which had been covered in with striped canvas for the season.

He drew forward a seat for her and took one himself, but did not speak for some time. He was apparently waiting for her to begin. A *tête-à-tête* with a man to whom one has just forbidden one's house is necessarily a delicate matter, and, although Mabel did not falter at all in her purpose, she did feel a certain nervousness which made her unwilling to speak at first.

'As you leave me to begin,' he said, 'let me ask you if what your husband has told me just now is true—that you have closed your own door to me, and mean to induce Mrs. Langton to do the same?'

'It is true,' she replied in a low voice: 'you left me no other course.'

'You know what the result of that will be, I suppose?' he continued. 'Mrs. Featherstone will soon find out that two such intimate friends of hers will have nothing to do with me, and she will naturally want to know the reason. What shall you tell her?'

'That is what I meant to say to you!' she answered. 'I thought I ought in fairness to tell you—that you might, perhaps, take it as a warning. If I am asked, though I hope I shall not be, I shall feel bound to say what I know.'

'Do you think I can't see what you are aiming at in all this?' he asked; and under his smooth tones there were indications of coming rage. 'You have set yourself to drive me out of this house!'

'All I wish,' said Mabel, 'is to prevent you as far as I can from ever tormenting Dolly again—I am determined to do that!'

'You know as well as I do that you will do much more than that. Mrs. Featherstone does not love me as it is: your conduct will give her the excuse she wants to get rid of me!'

'I can't help it,' she said firmly. 'And if Gilda is brought to see, before it is too late, what things you are capable of, it would be the best thing that could happen for her.'

'It would be more straightforward, wouldn't it, if you told her at once?' he suggested with a slight sneer: 'it comes to very much the same thing in the end.'

Mabel had had some searchings of conscience on this very point. Ought she, she had asked herself, knowing what she knew of Caffyn's past, to stand by while a girl whom she liked as she did Gilda deceived herself so grossly? But of late a coldness had sprung up between Gilda and herself which made it unlikely that any interference would be taken in good part; and besides, there was something invidious in such a course, to which she could not bring herself without feeling more certain than she did that it was necessary and would be of any avail.

'If I was sure I should do the least good, I should certainly tell her,' Mabel replied; 'but I hope now that it will not be necessary.'

He bit his lips. 'You are exceedingly amiable, I must say,' he observed; 'but really now, why all this bitterness? What makes you so anxious to see an obscure individual like myself jilted—and ruined?'

'Am I bitter?' said Mabel. 'I don't think so. You ought to know that I do not wish for your ruin, but I can't help wishing that this marriage should be broken off.'

'Ah!' he said softly, 'and may I ask why?'

'Why!' cried Mabel. 'Can you ask? Because you are utterly unworthy of any nice and good girl—you will make your wife a very miserable woman, Harold—and you are marrying Gilda for money and position, not love—you don't know what love means, that is why!'

Even in the half-light which came from the shaded lamps in the room within she looked very lovely in her indignation, and he hated her the more for it—it was maddening to feel that he was absolutely despicable and repulsive in the eyes of this woman, to whose fairness even hatred itself could not blind him.

'You are unjust,' he said, bending towards her. 'You forget—I loved *you*! I expected that,' he added, for she had turned impatiently away; 'it always does rouse some women's contempt to be told of a love they don't feel in return. But I did love you, as I suppose I never shall love again. As for Gilda, I don't mind confessing that, on my side at all events, there is no very passionate emotion. She is handsome enough in her peculiar style, but then it doesn't happen to appeal to me. Still, she will bring me money and position, and she does me the honour (if I may say so without vanity) of caring very decidedly for *me*—it is fair enough on both sides. What right have you, what right has any one in the world, to interfere and make mischief between us?'

'None perhaps—I don't know,' she said. 'But I have told you that I shall not interfere. All I am quite sure of is that I am right to protect Dolly, and, if I am asked, to speak the truth for Gilda's sake. And I mean to do it.'

'I have told you already what that will end in,' he said. 'Mabel, you can't really be so relentless! I ask you once more to have some consideration for me. We were old playmates together once; there was a time when we were almost lovers—you did not always hate me like this. You might remember that now. If—if I were to promise not to go near Dolly——'

'I trusted you once before,' she said, 'you know how you repaid it. I will make no more terms. Besides, even if I were silent, there are others who know——'

'None who would not be silent if you wished it,' urged Caffyn, eagerly. 'Give me one more chance, Mabel!'

'You have had my answer—I shall not change it,' she said: 'now take me back, please, we have been here long enough.'

Caffyn had been anxious from motives of pure economy to try fair means first, before resorting to extreme measures: he had

tried irony, argument, flattery, and sentiment, and all in vain. It was time for his last *coup*. He motioned her to remain as she half rose.

'Not yet,' he said. 'I have something to say to you first, and you must hear it—you have driven me to it. . . . Remember that, when I have finished!'

She sank back again half quelled by the power she felt in the man. From the streets below came up the constant roll of wheels and 'clip-clop' of hoofs from passing broughams, intermingled now and then with shouts and shrill whistles telling of early departures from sundry awning-covered porticoes around.

From the music-room within came the sound of waltz music, only slightly muffled by doors and hangings: they were playing 'My Queen,' though she was not conscious of hearing it at the time. In after-time, however, when that waltz, with the refrain, part dreamy, part passionate, which even battered brass and iron hammers cannot render quite commonplace, became popular with street bands and piano-organs, it was always associated, for her, with a vague sensation of coming evil. Caffyn had risen, and stood looking down upon her with a malignant triumph which made her shudder even then.

'Do you remember,' he said, very clearly and slowly, 'once, when you had done your best to humiliate me, that I told you I hoped for your sake I should never have a chance of turning the tables?'

He paused, while she looked up at him with her eyebrows drawn and her lips slightly parted.

'I think my chance has come,' he continued, seeing that she did not mean to answer—'really I do. When I have told you what I am going to tell you, all that pretty disdain and superiority of yours will vanish like smoke, and in a minute or two you will be begging my silence at any price, and you shall accept my terms!'

'I do not think so,' said Mabel, bravely: only her own curiosity and the suggestion of some hidden power in the other's manner kept her from refusing to remain there any longer.

'I do,' said Caffyn. 'Ah, Mabel, you are a happy woman, with a husband who is the ideal of genius and goodness and good looks. What will you say, I wonder, when I tell you that you owe all this happiness to me? It's true. I watched the growth of your affection with the deepest interest, and at the critical moment, when

an unexpected obstacle to your union turned up, it was I who removed it at considerable personal sacrifice. Aren't you grateful? Well, between ourselves, I could scarcely expect gratitude.'

'I—I don't understand,' she said.

'I am going to explain,' he rejoined. 'You have been pitying poor Gilda for throwing herself away on a worthless wretch like me. Keep your pity, you will want it yourself perhaps! Do you understand now? I let you marry Mark, because I could think of no revenge so lasting and so perfect!'

She rose quickly. 'I have heard enough,' she said: 'you must be mad to dare to talk like this. . . . Let me go, you hurt me.' He had caught her arm above her long glove, and held it tight for a moment, while he bent his face down close to hers, and looked into her eyes with a cruel light in his own.

'You shall not go till you have heard me out,' he said between his teeth. 'You have married a common impostor, an impudent swindler—do you understand? I knew it long ago . . . I could have exposed him fifty times if I had chosen! A few lines from me to the proper quarter, and the whole story would be public property to-morrow—as fine a scandal as literary London has had for ages; and, by Heaven, Mabel, if you don't treat me decently, I'll speak out! I see you can't take my word for all this. Perhaps you will take your husband's? Ask him if his past has no secrets (there should be none between you now, you know): ask him——'

He would have said more, but she freed herself suddenly from his grasp and turned on him from the window. 'You coward,' she cried scornfully, 'I am not Dolly—you cannot frighten me!'

He was not prepared for this, having counted upon an instant surrender which would enable him to dictate his own terms. 'I don't want to frighten you,' he said sulkily: 'I only want you to see that I don't mean to be trifled with!' He had followed her to the window, meaning to induce her to return, but all at once he stepped back hastily. 'There's some one coming,' he said in a rapid undertone: 'it's Mrs. Featherstone. Mabel—you won't be mad enough to tell her!'

'You shall see,' said Mabel, and the next moment she had taken refuge by the side of her hostess, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed with anger. 'Mrs. Featherstone,' she said, almost clinging to her in her excitement, 'let me go back with you, anywhere where I shall be safe from that man!'

Caffyn was no longer visible, having retired to the balcony, so

that the elder lady was somewhat bewildered by this appeal, especially as she did not quite catch it. 'Of course you shall go back with me if you want to,' she said; 'but are you all alone here? I thought I should find Mr. Caffyn. Where is he?'

'There, on the balcony,' said Mabel. 'It is no wonder that he is ashamed to show himself!'

At this Caffyn judged it advisable to appear.

'I don't exactly know *why* I should be afraid,' he said, with a rather awkward ease. 'Are you going to publish our little quarrel, Mrs. Ashburn? Is it worth while, do you think?'

'It was no quarrel,' retorted Mabel. 'Will you tell Mrs. Featherstone what you dared to say to me, or must I?'

Mrs. Featherstone looked from one to the other with growing uneasiness. It would be very awkward to have any unpleasantness in her little company when the play was so far advanced. On the other hand, she was not disposed to soften matters for a man she disliked so heartily as she disliked Harold Caffyn.

'Mabel, dearest, tell me what it is all about,' she said. 'If he has insulted you, he shall answer to me for it!'

'He insulted my husband,' said Mabel. 'I *will* speak, Harold. I am not afraid, though I know you have every reason to wish your words forgotten. He said——'

Here Caffyn interrupted her: he had made up his mind the only thing he could do with his secret now was to use it to spike the enemy's guns. Mabel was rash enough to insist on an explanation: she should have it.

'One moment,' he said. 'If you still insist on it, I will repeat what I said presently. I was trying to prepare Mrs. Ashburn for a very painful disclosure,' he explained to Mrs. Featherstone—'a disclosure which, considering my position in the family, I felt it would be my duty to make before long. I could not possibly foresee that she would take it like this. If you think a little, Mrs. Ashburn, I am sure you will see that this is not the time or place for a very delicate and unpleasant business.'

'He pretends that Mark is an impostor—that he knows some secret of his!' Mabel broke in vehemently. 'He did not speak of it as he tries to make you believe . . . he threatened me!'

'Dear Mr. Ashburn, whom we all know so well, an impostor—with a secret! You said that to Mabel?' cried Mrs. Featherstone. 'Why, you must be mad to talk in that dreadful way—quite mad!'

'My dear Mrs. Featherstone, I assure you I'm perfectly sane,' he replied. 'The real truth is that the world has been grossly deceived all this time—no one more so than yourself; but I do beg you not to force me to speak here, where we might be interrupted at any moment, and besides, in ordinary consideration to Mrs. Ashburn—'

'You did not consider me very much just now,' she broke in. 'I have told you that I am not afraid to hear—you cannot get out of it in that way!'

Mabel was well enough aware that Mark was not flawless, but the idea that he could be capable of a dishonourable action was grotesque and monstrous to her, and the only way she could find to punish the man who could conceive such a charge was to force him to declare it openly.

Mrs. Featherstone's curiosity and alarm had been strongly roused. She had taken up this young novelist, her name was publicly connected with his—if there was anything wrong about him, ought she not to know it?

'My love,' she said to Mabel, taking her hands, 'you know I don't believe a word of all this—it is some strange mistake, I am sure of it, but it ought, perhaps, to be cleared up. If I were to speak to Mr. Caffyn alone now!'

'I shall be very willing,' said Caffyn.

'No!' said Mabel, eagerly, 'if he has anything to say, let him say it here—Mark must not be stabbed in the dark!'

'It's simply impossible to speak here,' said Caffyn. 'People may come in at any moment through those doors as soon as this waltz is over. Mrs. Featherstone will not thank either of us for making a scene.'

'The doors can be locked,' cried Mabel. 'There need be no scene. *May* they be locked, dear Mrs. Featherstone? He has said too much to be silent any longer: he *must* speak now!'

Caffyn stepped lightly to the doors which opened into the music-room; the key was on his side, and he turned it. The last notes of 'My Queen' were sounding as he did so, they could hear the sweep and rustle of dresses as the couples passed.

'We shall not be disturbed now,' he said, unable to quite conceal his own inclinations: 'they are not likely to come in from the staircase. If Mrs. Featherstone really insists on my speaking, I can't refuse.'

'Must I, Mabel?' asked the elderly lady, nervously; but Mabel

had turned towards the door leading to the staircase, which had just opened.

'Here is Mark to answer for himself!' she cried, as she went



to meet him. 'Now, Harold, whatever you have to say against Mark, say it to his face!'

Mark's entrance was not so opportune as it seemed; he had been standing unnoticed at the door for some time, waiting until

he could wait no longer. He faced Caffyn now, unflinchingly enough to outward appearance; but the hand Mabel held in a soft close clasp was strangely cold and unresponsive.

Caffyn could not have wished for a better opportunity. 'I assure you this is very painful to me,' he said, 'but you see I cannot help myself. I must ask Mr. Ashburn first if it is not true that this book "Illusion," which has rendered him so famous, is not his book at all—that from beginning to end it was written by another. Is he bold enough to deny it?'

Mark made no answer. Mabel had almost laughed to hear so preposterous a question—it was not wonderful that he should scorn to reply. Suddenly she looked at his face, and her heart sickened. Many incidents that she had attached no importance to at the time came back to her now laden with vague but terrible significance . . . she would not doubt him, only—why did he look as if it was true?

'Dear Mr. Ashburn,' said Mrs. Featherstone, 'we know what your answer will be, but I think—I'm afraid—you ought to say something.'

He turned his ghastly face and haggard eyes to her and at the same instant withdrew his hand from Mabel's. 'What would you have me say?' he asked hoarsely. 'I can't deny it . . . it is not my book . . . from beginning to end it was written by another.'

And, as he spoke the words, Vincent Holroyd entered the room.

His recent attack of faintness had left him so weak that for some time he was obliged to remain in a little alcove on the staircase and rest himself on one of the divans there.

His head was perfectly clear, however, and he had already perfected a plan by which Mabel would be spared the worst of that which threatened her. It was simple, and, as far as he could see, quite impossible to disprove—he would let it be understood that Mark and he had written the book in collaboration, and that he had desired his own share of the work to be kept secret.

Mark could not refuse, for Mabel's sake, to second him in this statement—it was actually true even, for—as Vincent thought with a grim kind of humour—there *was* a good deal of Mark's work in the book as it stood now. He grew feverishly impatient to see Mark and put his plan into action—there must be time yet, Caffyn could not have been such a villain as to open Mabel's eyes to the real case! He felt strong again now; he would go and assure

himself this there was so. He rose and, following the direction he had seen Mark take, entered the Gold Room—only to hear an admission after which no defence seemed possible.

He stood there just behind Mark, trying to take in what had happened. There was Mrs. Featherstone struggling to conceal her chagrin and dismay at the sudden downfall of her dramatic ambition; Mark standing apart with bent head and hands behind him like a man facing a firing party; Mabel struck speechless and motionless by the shock; and Caffyn with the air of one who has fulfilled an unpalatable duty. Vincent knew it all now—he had come too late!

Mrs. Featherstone made a movement toward him. 'Oh, Mr. Holroyd,' she said, with a very strained smile, 'you mustn't come in, please: we're—we're talking over our little play—state secrets, you know!'

Caffyn's smile meant mischief as he said: 'Mr. Holroyd has every right to be here, my dear Mrs. Featherstone, as you'll allow when I tell you who he is. He has too much diffidence to assert himself. Mr. Ashburn has admitted that he did not write "Illusion";' he might have added that he stole the book in a very treacherous and disgraceful way. I am sorry to use words of this sort, but when you know all you will understand that I have some excuse. Mr. Holroyd can tell you the story better than I can: he is the man who has been wronged, the real author of "Illusion"!'

'I've done him a good turn there,' he thought; 'he can't very well turn against me after that!'

A terrible silence followed his words; Vincent's brain whirled, he could think of nothing. Mabel was the first to move or speak: she went to Mark's side as he stood silent and alone before his accuser, and touched his arm. 'Mark,' she said in an agonised whisper, 'do you hear? . . . tell them . . . it is not true—oh, I can't believe it—I won't—only speak!'

Vincent's heart swelled with a passionate devotion for her as she raised her fair face, blanched and stricken with an agony of doubt and hope, to her husband's averted eyes. How she loved him. What would he not have given for love like that? His own feelings were too true and loyal, however, to wish even for a moment to see the love and faith die out of her face, slain forever by some shameful confession.

Was it too late to save her even now? His brain cleared suddenly—a way of escape had opened to him.

In the meantime two new-comers had entered. Mr. Featherstone, hearing voices, had brought up Mr. Langton, who had 'looked in' on his way from the House, and for some time remained under the impression that they had interrupted some kind of informal rehearsal. 'Still at the theatricals, eh?' he observed as he came in. 'Go on, don't let us disturb you. Capital, capital!' 'Langton,' whispered the other, pulling him back, 'they're—they're *not acting*—I'm afraid something's the matter!' and the two waited to gather some idea of what was happening.

Before Mark could reply, if he meant to reply, to Mabel's appeal, Vincent had anticipated him. 'Mrs. Ashburn—Mabel,' he said, 'you are right to trust in his honour—it is *not* true. I can explain everything.'

The instant joy and relief in her face as she clung fondly to Mark's arm repaid him and gave him strength and courage to go on. Mark looked round with a stunned wonder. What could be said or done to save him *now*? he thought. Vincent was mad to try. But the latter put his hand, as if affectionately, on his shoulder with a warning pressure, and he said nothing.

'Do you mean,' said Caffyn to Holroyd, with an angry sneer, 'that I told a lie—that you did *not* write "Illusion"?''

'That was not the lie,' returned Vincent. 'I did write "Illusion." It is untrue that Mr. Ashburn's conduct in the matter does him anything but credit. May I tell my story here, Mrs. Featherstone?'

'Oh, by all means,' said that lady, not too graciously: 'we can't know the facts too soon.'

'I wrote the book,' said Vincent, 'before I went out to Ceylon. I was at the Bar then, and had thoughts of practising again at some future time. I had a fancy (which was foolish, I dare say) to keep the fact that I had written a novel a close secret. So I intrusted the manuscript to my good friend, Mr. Ashburn, leaving him to arrange, if he could, for its publication, and I charged him to keep my secret by every means in his power. In fact, I was so much in earnest about it that I made him give me his solemn promise that, if he could not shield me in any other way, he would do so with his own name. I did not really believe then that that would be necessary, or even that the book would be accepted, but I knew Mr. Ashburn wrote novels himself, and I hoped the arrangement would not do him any actual harm.'

Till then he had gone on fluently enough; it was merely

a modification of his original idea, with a considerable blending of the actual facts, but he felt that there were difficulties to come which it would require all his skill to avoid.

'I was detained, as you know, for more than a year in Ceylon, and unable most of the time to write to England,' he continued. 'When I came home, I found—I was told that the book had obtained a success neither of us ever dreamed of: curiosity had been aroused, and Mr. Ashburn had found himself driven to keep his promise. He—he was anxious that I should release him and clear the matter up. I—I—it was not convenient for me to do so just then, and I induced him—he could hardly refuse, perhaps—to keep up the disguise a little longer. We had just arranged to make everything known shortly, when Mr. Caffyn anticipated us. And that is really all there is to tell about that.'

Throughout Vincent's explanation Caffyn had been inwardly raging at the thought that his victims might actually succeed in escaping after all. Forcing an indulgent laugh, he said, 'My dear fellow, it's very kind and generous of you to say all that, and it sounds very pretty and almost probable, but you can't expect us seriously to believe it, you know!'

For an instant this remark appeared to produce a reaction; but it vanished at Vincent's reply. His pale worn face flushed angrily as he faced him.

'No one seriously expects *you* to believe in such things as honour and friendship!' he said contemptuously. 'I am going to deal with your share in this now. Mrs. Featherstone,' he added, 'will you forgive me if I am obliged to pain you by anything I may have to say? That man has thought fit to bring a disgraceful charge against my friend here—it is only right that you should know how little he deserves credit!'

Secretly Mrs. Featherstone was only too glad to see Caffyn discomfited, but all she did was to say stiffly, 'Oh, pray don't consider my feelings, Mr. Holroyd!'

Vincent's indignation was enough in itself to make him merciless, and then, as a matter of policy, he was determined to disable the enemy to the utmost. Everything that had come to his knowledge of Caffyn's proceedings he now exposed with biting irony. He told the story of the letter, suppressed to all appearances out of gratuitous malice, and of the cruel terrorism exercised over little Dolly; he showed how Caffyn had tried to profit by his supposed discovery of the fraud, and how Mark had studiously refrained

from undeceiving him, and gave a damaging description of the sordid threats and proposals he had himself received that evening. 'This is the high-minded gentleman who, acting under a keen sense of duty, has chosen to denounce Mr. Ashburn just now,' he concluded.

The victory was won. Caffyn's face was livid as he heard him—he had never foreseen such black ingratitude as this, and it upset all his calculations. He still had his doubts, after so many careful experiments, that the story of Vincent's was a fabrication, even though it was not absolutely inconsistent with what he had observed, and he could see no motive for shielding the culprit. But it was plain that every one there believed it—Vincent's word would be taken before his—he was thoroughly beaten.

No one had seen Gilda come in, but she had been standing for some time with red eyes and flushed face by one of the windows, and in the general stir which followed Vincent's explanation Mr. Featherstone came up to her.

'Well,' he said, 'we've been treated to a very pretty story this evening. This is the young gentleman you're going to give me for a son-in-law, is it, Gilda? But of course you don't believe a word against him!'

'I believe it all—and more!' she said with a passionate sob.

Caffyn turned to her. 'You too, Gilda!' he cried pathetically.

'You might have deceived me even after this,' she said, 'only—mamma sent me to go and fetch you—I heard you out there on the balcony, talking to Mabel, and—and I went out by the other window, this one, and along the balcony to the corner——'

'And, in point of fact, you listened!' he said.

'Yes, I did,' she retorted, 'and I shall be glad of it all my life. I heard enough to save me from you!'

She left him there and flew to Mabel, whom she embraced with a remorseful hug.

'You darling!' she whispered, 'what a wicked fool I was ever to be jealous of you—and about *him*. You will forgive me, won't you? And I am *so* glad about poor dear Mr. Ashburn.'

Mr. Featherstone tapped Caffyn lightly on the shoulder.

'Well, Master Harold,' he said, 'have you got anything to say? With all this suppressing, and plotting, and bullying, and threatening, and the rest of it—it strikes me you have made a d—d fool of yourself!'

The same idea had already occurred to Caffyn. He had been

admirably cool and cautious; he had devoted all his energies to securing Mabel's marriage to Mark; he had watched and waited and sprung his mine with every precaution—and he was the only person it had blown up! His schemes had failed exactly like a common fool's—which was painful to reflect upon.

'If I haven't,' he said with a slight grimace, 'I've been made to look very like one.'

'You're more rogue than fool, after all,' observed the merchant, with distressing candour; 'and, by the way, I'm rather particular about getting all my correspondence, and I invariably prefer to burn my own letters. I don't think my offices are quite the place for such a gifted young fellow as you seem to be.'

'You mean I'm to go?' said Caffyn.

'I do,' was the reply. 'I never will have any one about me I can't trust. I did think once—but that's over—you heard what my girl said to you!—we'd better part now. I won't deny I'm sorry!'

'Not sorrier than I am, I'll swear!' said Caffyn, with a short laugh. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Featherstone,' he added to that lady, who stood by. '*You're* not sorry, are you? Gilda will be a duchess after all—now!'

And he left the house, feeling as he passed out that the very footmen by the entrance knew of his discomfiture, and carrying away with him for a lasting recollection Mabel's look of radiant happiness as she heard Mark so completely vindicated.

'Revenge is sweet,' he thought bitterly, 'but I kept mine too long, and it's turned devilish sour!'

'Well, my dear,' said Mr. Featherstone to his wife, 'you've been leaving your other young people to their own devices all this time. Wouldn't it be as well to go and look after them?'

The dancing had been going on in the adjoining room while all this was taking place, now and then the doors had been tried by couples in search of a cool retreat between the waltzes, but no one suspected what important revelations were being made within.

Mrs. Featherstone was deeply mortified. It was true she had got rid of a hated presence, but her play—which she had meant to make the closing event of the season, and by which she had hoped to conquer one or two of the remaining rungs of the social ladder—her play was rendered impossible; this affair would get into the society papers, with every perversion which wit or malice could supply—she would be made thoroughly ridiculous!

'I'll go,' she said. 'I must get rid of everybody as soon as I decently can—this shocking business has completely upset me.'

Mark and Vincent were standing together at the door, and as she passed out she visited some of her pent-up displeasure upon them.

'Well, Mr. Ashburn and Mr. Holroyd,' she said, in tones that were intended to sound playful, 'I hope you are quite contented with your little mystification? Such a very original idea on both your parts, really. How it must have amused you both to see me making such an absurd exhibition of myself all this time! Seriously, though, I do consider I have been very, *very* shabbily treated—you might have warned me as a friend, Mr. Ashburn, without betraying any one's confidence! No, don't explain any more, either of you: I could not bear any explanations just now!'

Mr. Langton, as he followed her, took Mark out with him, and as soon as they were alone gave full vent to his own indignation.

'I don't understand your conceptions of honour,' he said. 'Whatever your duty might be to Vincent, you clearly had duties towards my daughter and myself. Do you suppose I should have given her to you if I had known? It just comes to this, and no sophistry can get over it—you obtained my consent under false pretences!'

For he was naturally intensely humiliated by the difference these disclosures must make in his daughter's position, and did not spare his son-in-law. He said much more to the same effect, and Mark bore it all without attempting a defence: he still felt a little stunned by the danger he had passed through, and, after all, he thought, what he had heard now was nothing to what might have been said to him!

Obedying a glance from Mabel, as the others followed Mrs. Featherstone back to the music-room, Vincent had remained behind.

'When will you allow this to be generally known?' she asked, and her voice had a strange new coldness which struck him with terror. Had she seen through his device? Was it all useless?

'As soon as possible,' he answered gently. 'We shall see the publishers to-morrow, and then all the details will be arranged.'

'And your triumph will come,' she said bitterly. 'I hope you will be able to enjoy it!'

'Mabel,' he said earnestly, 'Harold Caffyn forced me to speak to-night—surely you saw that? I—I did not intend to claim the book yet.'

'Why didn't you claim it long ago?' she demanded. 'Why must you put this burden on Mark at all? Surely your secret could have been kept without that! But you came home and knew what a success Mark's (*your* book, I beg your pardon—it is strange at first, you know)—what a success your book had been, and how hard it was making his life for him—he begged you then, you admit, to take back his promise, and you—you would not. Oh, it was selfish, Vincent, cruelly selfish of you!'

His sole concern in making that hasty explanation had been to give it an air of reasonable probability: he had never given a thought till that moment of the light in which he was presenting his own conduct. Now, in one terrible instant, it rushed upon him with an overwhelming force.

'I—I acted for the best,' he said; and even to himself the words sounded like a sullen apology.

'For *your* best!' she said. 'The book will be talked of more than ever now. But did you never think of the false position in which you were placing Mark? What will become of him after this? People might have read his books once—they will never read them now—they may even say that—that Harold Caffyn may have been right. And all that is your work, Vincent!'

He groaned within him at his helplessness; he stood before her with bowed head, not daring to raise his eyes, lest he should be tempted to undo all his work.

'I was proud of Mark,' she continued, 'because I thought he had written "Illusion." I am prouder now—it is better to be loyal and true, as Mark has been, than to write the noblest book and sacrifice a friend to it. There are better things than Fame, Vincent!'

Even his devotion was not proof against this last injustice; he raised his head, and anger burnt in his eyes.

'You tell me that!' he cried passionately. 'As if I had ever cared for Fame in itself! Mabel, you have no right to say these things to me—do you hear? no right! Have some charity, try and believe that there may be excuses even for me—that if you could know my motives you might feel you had been unjust!'

'Is there anything I don't know?' she asked, somewhat moved by this outburst, 'anything you have kept from me?'

'No. You have heard all I have to say—all there is to tell,' he admitted.

'Then I am not unjust!' she said; 'but if you feel justified in acting as you have done, so much the better for you, and we shall do no good by talking any more about it.'

'None whatever,' he agreed.

When he was alone that night he laughed fiercely to himself at the manner in which his act of devotion had been accepted. All his sacrifices had ended in making Mabel despise him for calculating selfishness; he had lost her esteem for ever.

If he had foreseen this, he might have hesitated, deep and unselfish as his love was; but it was done, and he had saved her. Better, he tried to think, that she should despise him, than lose her belief in her husband, and, with it, all that made life fair to her.

But altruism of this kind is a cold and barren consolation. Men do good by stealth now and then, men submit to misconception, but then it is always permitted to them to dream that, some day, an accident may bring the good or the truth to light. This was a hope which, by the nature of the case, Vincent could never entertain, and life was greyer to him even than before.

(To be concluded)

